

# The Shepherd of My Soul



by Father Charles Jerome Callan

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# **Psalm of the Good Shepherd**

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in pastures of tender grass.

He restoreth my soul.

He leadeth me in the paths of justice for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,  
for thou art with me.

Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou spreadest before me a table in the presence of mine enemies.

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I  
shall dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days.

## Introduction

No types more beautiful could have been chosen under which to picture the character of our Lord and the souls He came to redeem than those of a shepherd and his flock. As nothing on earth could more fitly illustrate the infinite love and sacrifice of the Saviour than the enduring labors and tenderness of a shepherd, so nothing here below could better portray the multiple wants of our spirits than the needful dependent nature of sheep. After the knowledge we possess of our Redeemer, only a slight acquaintance with the characteristics of pastoral life, as it exists in oriental countries, is needed to discern the charming fitness of these comparisons. The similarity is at once striking and most easily understood. Hence it is that our Lord, as well as those who described Him before He came, so often appealed to shepherd life when speaking of the Messiah's mission; hence, also, it is that He was so fond of calling Himself the Good Shepherd, and of alluding to the souls He loved as His sheep.

It is the purpose of the pages that follow to trace some of these beautiful and touching resemblances of the shepherd and his flock, on the one side, roaming over the hills and plains of Palestine, and the Saviour of the World with the souls of men, on the other, pursuing together the journey of life. We have taken as our guide, in noting these charming likenesses, the Twenty-second Psalm, or the Psalm of the Good Shepherd, every verse of which recalls some feature or features of pastoral life, and sings of the offices, tender and varied, which the shepherd discharges towards his flock.

As this shepherd song was composed and written in the Hebrew tongue, the language of ancient Palestine, we have employed here a literal translation from the original language, simply because it expresses much more beautifully and more exactly than does any rendering from the Latin or Greek the various marks and characteristics of the shepherd's life and duties. The oriental languages, like the people who speak them, are exceedingly figurative and poetic in their modes of expression; and hence, for our present purpose, it is only by getting back as closely as we can to the original that we are able adequately to appreciate the beauty and poetry of that simple but charming life about which the Psalmist is singing.

Although the Shepherd Psalm refers, in its literal sense, to the human shepherd attending and providing for his sheep, it has also another higher meaning, which its author gave it, and this has reference to Christ in His relations with the souls He has made and redeemed. It is by reflecting on this sense of the psalm, and on all His gracious dealings with us, that we are enabled to realize how rightly and justly our Saviour is called the Shepherd of Our Souls, and how beautifully the Psalmist, in the shepherd song, has depicted His relations with us. And how important this is! how much it means for our spiritual welfare and spiritual advancement to reflect on the many mercies of Christ and on the love He bears each one of us! If the considerations that follow assist their readers to appreciate more fully and love more ardently the Divine Shepherd of Souls, who daily and constantly throughout our lives is ministering to our spiritual needs and trying to further our eternal interests, the desire and aim which prompted their writing will be fully and perfectly realized.

- *Father Charles Jerome Callan, O.P.*

# Christ the Good Shepherd

It was announced by the prophets of old that the Messiah, who was to come, should bear the character of a good shepherd. He was to be a shepherd, and His followers, the faithful souls that should believe in Him and accept His teaching, were to be His sheep. It was foretold that He would select and purchase His flock; that He would choose them from out the vast multitudes of their kind and gather them into His fold, that He would provide for them and guard them against every evil; that He would lead them out to green pastures and refresh them with the waters of rest. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd," sang the Prophet Isaias; "he shall gather together the lambs with his arms, and shall take them up in his bosom, and he himself shall carry them that are with young." (Isaiah 40:11) In like manner did Jeremias, referring to the comforting advent of Christ, liken the offices which the Saviour would perform towards His people to those of shepherds towards their flocks. "I will set up pastors over them," said the Prophet, speaking in the name of Jehovah, "and they shall feed them; they shall fear no more, and they shall not be dismayed; and none shall be wanting of their number.... Behold the days come, saith the Lord, and I will raise up to David a just branch; and a king shall reign, and shall be wise, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." (Jeremiah 23:4,5) The Prophet Ezechiel also prophetically portrayed the Saviour's character when he pictured Him in the capacity of a shepherd visiting and feeding his sheep: "For thus saith the Lord God: Behold I myself will seek my sheep, and I will visit them. As the shepherd visiteth his flock in the day when he shall be in the midst of his sheep that were scattered, so will I visit my sheep, and I will deliver them out of all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." (Ezechiel 34:11,12,23)

And when at length the Saviour did appear in the world, He declared, not only by His life and example, but in explicit terms, that He was the fulfilment of these prophecies - that He was, in truth, the Good Shepherd, and that His followers were the sheep of His fold. In the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John we have His own words to this effect. There

He tells us plainly that He has not come as a thief and a robber, to steal, to kill, and to destroy; that He is not a stranger, at the sound of whose voice the sheep are terrified and flee away; that He is not a hireling, who cares not for the sheep, and who, beholding the approach of the wolf and the enemy, fleeth and leaveth the sheep to be snatched and scattered and torn. The Saviour is not any of these, nor like unto them. He is the Good Shepherd who enters the sheepfold by the door, and not as the thief and robber who climb up some other way. To Him the porter openeth, and He calleth His sheep, and they know His voice and follow Him, and He leadeth them out to pasture, to rest, and to abundant life. Nor is this all, for He protects and guards His sheep. By day and by night He is ever near them: when circling the green plains, or beside the still waters, or when asleep beneath the silent stars, the sheep are protected by their Shepherd. Faithfully He watches His dependent flock; and at the end, as a proof of His love and fidelity, He generously lays down His life for His sheep.

## Shepherd Life in the Orient

We cannot appreciate the beauty of this picture of our Saviour under the symbol of a shepherd, nor can we later understand the detailed description which is given of Him through the spiritual meaning of the Good Shepherd Psalm without first taking into account some of the features of pastoral life as it prevails in eastern countries. For us of the western world it is difficult, and at times next to impossible, to represent to ourselves the life and customs of the Orient; and in particular do we find it hard to picture to our minds and to understand the simple poetry of that shepherd life for which Palestine has always been known. Time has little changed the scene of the Saviour's earthly labors. The people, their manners and customs, their life and occupations, remain much the same now as when the land was graced by His sacred presence. Thus today, as in those olden times, all the level country east of the river Jordan, as well as the mountains of Palestine and Syria, serves as vast pasture lands for innumerable flocks and herds. The country throughout is essentially pastoral in its character, and the care and raising of sheep constitute the chief industry of the people. From sheep the people are furnished with nearly all the necessities of life - with meat, clothing, milk, butter, and cheese.

The care of sheep is a delicate and, in many ways, a difficult task. Not that they are froward or hard to manage, for of all animals they are the most tender and gentle; nor again, that they need abundant nourishment in the way of food and drink, since they require water but once a day, and can maintain life and strength on a plain which, to the naked eye, seems little more than a barren waste of sand. But because, in other respects, they are exceedingly timid and helpless creatures, especially in times and places of danger, the burdens which their welfare and safety impose upon the shepherd, while paternal and winning, are, nevertheless, arduous and manifold. There are the changes and hardships of the climate - the cold and frost in winter, and the heat and drought of summer; there are the long rough walks, the steep and dangerous passes which they must climb and descend; there are perils from robbers, from wolves and wild beasts, which not infrequently demand the shepherd's utmost watchfulness and care. The oriental climate is such that they can graze nearly the whole year through;



and whether they be grazing on the wide open plains, or huddled snugly within the sheepfold, it pertains to the shepherd to provide for their varied needs. His vigilance can never cease. He must lead them out to pasture and to water, he must guide and protect them, he must gather them into the fold at night or into caves and enclosures, at times, during the day, to shield them from great danger, whether from enemies or violent weather; and upon all occasions he must be prepared to defend them, even at the risk of his own life.

The folds or sheep pens, it must be observed, into which the sheep are gathered for rest or protection are not roofed over or walled in like a house. They are enclosures left open to the sky, and consisting simply of a high wall of rough stone, to protect the sheep from the attacks of wild beasts, and from prowling marauders who threaten their safety by night. It often happens that several flocks, belonging to different shepherds, will graze on the same pastures during the day, and will be penned in the same sheepfold at night. While the sheep are sleeping, and the shepherds near by are taking their needed rest, the door of the fold is carefully locked, and another shepherd or porter is left on guard, lest perchance a hungry bear or wolf might scale the wall and destroy some member or members of the sleeping herds. Early in the morning the shepherds come in turn and rap at the door, and to each the porter opens. Then each shepherd calls his flock by name; and they, knowing his voice, follow him, and he leads them out to their pastures. There is never any confusion, for each flock knows its own shepherd and obeys him alone. Other shepherds they will not heed; and from the voice of strangers they flee.

It is a beautiful scene to see a shepherd with his flock. First, we must remember that he never drives them, but leads them; and they follow him with instinctive love and trust whithersoever he goes. He usually carries a rod and a staff: the latter he uses, when need be, to assist the sheep along dangerous paths and narrow passages; the former, to protect and defend them, if assailed by enemies or beasts of prey. Another evidence of their implicit love of their shepherd and trust in his goodness, as also of their obedience to his voice and commands, is beautifully manifest when several flocks are led to drink at the same stream or well. Although the sheep need to drink but once a day, the shepherds never forget, throughout the day's

roaming, that they must lead their flock to water. And as the drinking places in Palestine are comparatively few, it often happens that several herds, whether from the same or neighboring pastures, will arrive simultaneously at the same spring. But here again, there is neither trouble nor confusion. When they have drawn near to the place of water each shepherd gives a sign to his flock, and obedient to his voice, the respective flocks lie down and patiently wait their turn to drink. The troughs are then filled with the refreshing water, and when all is ready a shepherd calls and his flock at once rises and comes forward to drink. The sheep being satisfied, the shepherd gives another sign, and they promptly return to their previous place of rest, or move quietly away to their pasture, as the shepherd may direct. Another flock is then called up, watered and led away, and so on, in like manner, till all have been duly satisfied.

With this passing glance at shepherd life, we can better understand and better appreciate the likeness between the character of the Saviour and that of the good shepherd. We can see how apt it was that our Redeemer should choose a shepherd, with his multiple and tender cares and duties, to illustrate His own watchfulness and loving kindness towards the many wants and needs of our souls. For we are, indeed, His sheep. He has called us, we have heard and understood His voice, and He has gathered us into His flock and fold. He has literally vindicated for Himself in our regard all the attributes and qualities of the good shepherd, so far as described, and as still further depicted in every verse of the Twenty-second Psalm. This is called the Psalm of the Good Shepherd, because in it the Psalmist, under the symbol of a shepherd, prophetically foretold the character of the Messiah, our Saviour. The psalm has, therefore, a twofold meaning: in its literal sense it deals with the faithful shepherd, ranging with his flock over mountains and plains, and providing for their every want; and in its spiritual and prophetic meaning it relates to our Creator and Saviour, caring for our spiritual necessities. Let us see how this is; and that we may better perceive the application in detail, let us take this shepherd song, part by part, and see how beautifully it describes the whole person of Christ as God, and in His capacity as Redeemer - in all His tender relations with us, and towards the various needs of our souls.

## **The Lord Is My Shepherd, I Shall Not Want**

How full of meaning and how comprehensive are these simple yet beautiful words which introduce the Good Shepherd Psalm! They at once sum up the whole round of the shepherd's life - his duties, his solicitude, his ceaseless care of his sheep. But here, be it noted, in this opening verse, the reference, so direct and unmistakable, is not to an earthly shepherd; it is to the benign and constant Providence of Jehovah towards His children, to the untiring love of God, our Father and Saviour, for the souls He has created and redeemed. The Psalmist is looking back, in grateful remembrance, upon the history of his race, and upon his own life in particular, and he traces there at every step the goodness and watchfulness of his Creator. He sees there has never been any want. Dark days at times have come upon his nation, sufferings and trials there have been; and in these, as in other respects, his own individual experience has mirrored the history of his people; but throughout it all there has never been any lasting want. As the shepherd is ever near his sheep, whether at peace or in trouble, to provide for their needs, so, sings the Psalmist in gratitude, has God been near him and his people. And his confidence is unshaken; that which has been in the past will be in the future; as sheep put their trust in their shepherd, so will he put his trust in his Lord and God. Nor is this gratitude for past favors and this unshaken trust for the future to be restricted to the Psalmist alone; his words had meaning not only for himself; he knows the same Providence provides for us all, and therefore he would have his words find an echo in the hearts and sentiments of all.

The Lord is my shepherd; He ruleth me with the rod of gentleness. I am His creation, He has bought me with a great price, He has set me a divine example and taught me the way to life. There may be times of distress for me, brief periods of temporal need; but surely, since I am the possession of my God, and He is providing for me, nothing can long be wanting to me - permanent want there can never be.

The Lord ruleth me, and all my kind, as a shepherd ruleth his flock. What a consoling thought to each one of us, if only we be faithful souls! How unspeakable the thought, how surpassing the privilege to know and to be

assured that we belong to God! that out of countless millions of creatures, far nobler than we, to whom He might have given the joy of life, He has chosen to select us; to think that He has allotted to us a short period of existence here below, during which it is our privilege to be able to merit and draw near to Him for eternity; and that after this, our little time of trial, we are to reign with Him in everlasting glory! Of a certainty we are a favored people and a royal race, for we belong to God. He has purchased our souls by creating us, He has come down from Heaven to redeem and buy us back from the enemy to whom our race in folly had surrendered itself, He has borne our sorrows and our sufferings to make amends for us and to teach us the way to life, and finally He has given His own life for our salvation.

Since, then, God has created us, it follows that He must have had us in His mind from everlasting, because nothing that is, or can be, is unforeseen by Him. From the remotest dawn of eternity, therefore; from the very beginning of the eternal years, He saw us as He sees us now, clearly, distinctly, lovingly. We did not exist from eternity as we do now, but we were present to God before we were to ourselves, He saw us mirrored in Himself. And when, in time, He called our race into being and endowed it with life, we know what happened. This human nature of ours which He had loved from eternity, and favored in time with existence, turned its back upon its God and strayed away to sin and death. This was the disobedience of our first parents, and in their sin we all have shared, for the very reason that they were our parents and responsible for us as well as for themselves. We became a ruined race, deserving punishment, fit for perdition; and yet God did not give us up. He followed after us, as it were; He pursued us, as a shepherd pursues his chosen flock, until finally He led us back to His fold, and to pastures of rest and plenty.

It was not enough for God's goodness to give us the gift of life, and to endow us with understanding, will, and freedom; it did not satisfy His bountifulness to make our life fair here on earth, and to enable us to reap much of the joys and pleasures with which even this world abounds - no, far more than all this has He wished and prepared for His elect, for the souls who belong to His flock. It was nothing less than Himself, Heaven and its rewards, that the eternal Father had in store for us when He called us into being. In order, therefore, that we should not lose our destined crowns

through the guilt and wounds of original sin, He provided for us a remedy, He sent us a Saviour, who was His only son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now since it is to Christ, the Saviour, that the spiritual meaning of the Shepherd Psalm refers in a particular manner, it is in Him especially, and in His earthly life, that we discern and find fulfilled the chiefest qualities of the good shepherd. As God, we see, He has, indeed, been our shepherd from the beginning, creating and endowing our nature, and providing for us unnumbered benefits, temporal and eternal. But it is in His human nature, in His character as God and man, that He draws nearest to us and proves unto us in ways most gracious that He is, in truth, our loving Master and the Shepherd of our souls. Marvelous, assuredly, has been the goodness of God to create us at all; and still more marvelous that He should have destined us for a participation in His own eternal blessedness; but in no way has the heavenly Father so stooped to us, in no way has He so manifested His utter condescension towards us, as in the abasement of His Only-begotten Son, "who, being in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." (Philippians 2:6,7) For let us reflect that to raise our race from its fallen state and restore it to the divine good-pleasure, it was not necessary that the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity should have come down to earth. Such extraordinary means were not of necessity to bring us back to Heaven's smile and favor. As by a simple act of His omnipotent will God had called the world and us and all that is out of nothingness in the beginning, so again by a single wish of the same divine will He could have restored us, from a condition of bondage and sin, to the realms of grace and peace. And even when the Son of God did condescend, in accordance with the will of His Father, to clothe Himself with our nature and visit our blighted sphere, how simple, really, He could have made our redemption! How easily could He have blotted out the handwriting that was against us, and presented our tearful world, all smiling and glad, to the arms of His eternal Father! Yes, Christ could have made our redemption easy. He could have paid our debt to God in a thousand different, simple ways, had He wished it so. One drop of His precious blood, one tear of His eye, one sigh of the Sacred Heart would have sufficed to redeem innumerable worlds like ours.

But the Saviour wished it otherwise. He was our Shepherd and He loved us, His deceived and wounded sheep. He was with the Father when we were planned and made. He it was, in truth, who made us, for He and the Father are one. (John 10:30,38; 12:45) He, therefore, knew our nature, since He designed and gave it to us. He foresaw our yearnings and aspirations; He knew the sublime, transcendent possibilities of which, with His help and divine example, we are capable; He understood the heights of love and worship to which the human heart can ascend, when assisted from on high, and hence to awaken and kindle on earth these all-consuming fires; (Luke 12:49) to stir the very depths of our souls, and elevate and perfect our gifted nature; to afford us the utmost inspiration to climb with Him the heights of Heaven. He stooped to our own estate, in all things made like unto us, except, indeed, our proneness and ability to sin. Since He loved us, He longed to be like us, in as far as that was possible, and not even our sin-stained, wounded nature could stay the force of His love.

There is another reason for the mysterious manner of our redemption, a further explanation of the extreme condescension on the part of our Lord towards the frail creatures whom He came to save. Had he come to us in a foreign attire, with a nature unlike our own, would it not have been difficult for us to approach Him, and to put our confidence and trust in Him? If He had appeared like an angel, all bright and dazzling with glory, if He had come as an earthly king and ruler, crowned and clad in regal splendor, would it not have been hard for the poor ones of earth? would it not have been a trial for those who were in need of a shepherd's love and care? Already sorely oppressed and trodden down by worldly pomp and power, they could only have tried to shun His notice and draw back from Him with feelings of fear and awe. But our Redeemer came not only to save, but also to teach and to lead the way to life. As a shepherd He was not to drive, but to lead His sheep; He does not point the direction, but goes before His flock, and they follow Him, and He leads them out to living pastures and to bright, sparkling, far-off waters.

Because He was God, as well as man, Christ knew that, as a result of our sinful state, we should have to pass our earthly sojourn forever beneath the shadow of the cross. When sin entered into the world by the disobedience of the first man, the handiwork of the Creator was despoiled. That which

before had been a paradise of pleasure, replete with all delights, was wrecked and ruined, and became a place of sorrow, suffering and death. Thenceforth, pursuant to the divine decree, the lot of man was to labor, to suffer, and to die. (Genesis 3:19) Knowing, therefore, that this was to be our portion, the Shepherd-Saviour of our souls must also teach us the secret of pain and toil, and help us to bear our cross.

According, then, to our present state, suffering and sorrow are inseparable from us, because we are born into the world with sin upon our souls, and in the wake of sin follow all the evils to which the world is heir. And, moreover, under existing conditions, it is necessary for our future happiness that our earthly life be largely spent amidst toil and pain and tears. It is only through these that we shall be able to atone for the injuries sin has done, and hold in check the disorders of our nature. The cross is before us and we cannot escape it. It is ready for us when we enter the world, it follows us throughout the length of our days, and finally bears us down in death to our graves. This does not mean that life on earth is entirely made up of pain and sorrow, for the divine mercy has mitigated even the stroke of sin, and has caused the world, in spite of all its wounds, to bloom with many delights. Nevertheless, our sojourn here below shall always be fraught with diverse ills, and we at last must yield to death. In spite of all the world can afford us, in spite of its pleasures and joys, its sunshine and pleasing pastimes, real, though fitful and fast-flying as they are; in spite of health and wealth and fame and honor; in spite of all the goods that life contains, it still is ever true that we live in a region of tears, and that death and sorrow are sure to follow upon the footsteps of joy and mirth. It must be so, for the stains of sin are indelibly upon the world; and not until the final renovation comes can life on earth be made entirely happy.

All this our Saviour knew when He chose our human nature and embraced a life of labor and sorrow. His divine foreknowledge took in our lives, and the lives of all our kind, until the end of all shall be. Our infant tears, our trials and pains of body, the ceaseless pangs of mind and heart that pursue us throughout life, were all before Him as in a mirror, and He must needs instruct and assist us to fight this battle and walk this way of earth, lest all should perish before the journey's end. Since we were to suffer, then He would suffer also; since our lives were to be amidst labors and trials, then

He would labor and travail also; since we were to feel the sting of pain, be subject to heat and cold, be in want, in poverty, and in distress, be misunderstood, be thwarted, be cast down from our highest hopes, and broken, at times, in every cheerful prospect - since these and other countless ills were to be woven in our web of earthly life, He, the divine Master, who came to save, to teach a lesson, to suffer and die, would assume a body so sacred, so delicate, so pure and sensitive that, when exposed to the rough and ruthless ways of life, He could truly cry out from the depths of His anguish: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!" (Lamentations 1:12)

How comforting, then, it is for us to feel that we are not alone in suffering, and to know that, while all we suffer is but just and due to our sinful state, we can nevertheless make use of all our ills to attain to joys unending in Heaven! If we must toil and struggle while on earth, it is because these things are a result of our state; if we must be subject to sickness, to weakness and fatigue, to cold and hunger, to weariness and pain, it is not because God is pleased at the misery of His creatures; neither does He rejoice on account of our misfortune. We are simply reaping the harvest of sin and transgression, and sin is the work of our own free choice and that of our ancestors. And even though it be objected that we are born into this inevitable condition, and are made the unconsulted heirs of a heritage we loathe but cannot escape, the solution of our difficulty is not far to seek. We need but hearken to the promptings of reason, and lift our sorrowing eyes to the realms of faith to be convinced that God's mercy and goodness are above all His works, (Psalm 144:9) and that for reasons not less benevolent than holy He has called us into life and permitted all our woes. God could not have created us for suffering and punishment, because He is infinite goodness; He cannot be pleased at our misfortunes, since He Himself has borne our sorrows and carried all our pains. (Isaiah 53:4) If He Himself had not come into the world in visible human form; if He had not explained our purpose and destiny, and led the way to Heaven; if He had not, by His words and divine example, provided us with the solution for all life's difficulties, then, in truth, we might object, and sit and grieve and wonder. But in the light of the life of Christ all this is altered; the picture takes on a different coloring. Who now can rail at the crosses of life and think of the sufferings of Christ? Who can murmur at the injustice of pain, and



remember the passion of Jesus? Who can say that God is deaf to our pleading and unmoved at our tears, and look upon the Saviour dying? Who can believe that our lives are of little worth, or of no account with the Almighty, and recall the price that was paid for our souls and ponder the death of our God?

Thus it is with a bountiful goodness that the Saviour has purchased His sheep. By His own free choice, by a life of suffering entirely voluntary, endured for our salvation and instruction, through a bitter, but willing agony and death, He has provided the means to free us from sin, and has bequeathed to us every blessing. Now we can truly say: the Lord is my shepherd, and I shall not want. If only we can look into that divine life which has been given as our model, if only we can ponder it, and read in it the lessons, the hopes, the inspirations it contains for us, we shall not be weary of our burdens and cares, we shall not falter in any of life's battles. Rather, rejoicing at our opportunities, eternal as they are, and with feelings of exultant gratitude over our condition, as heirs with Christ to the kingdom of Heaven, (Romans 8:17) we shall bravely welcome all the conflicts of life, being assured with Saint Paul that "that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." (2 Corinthians 4:17)

## **He Maketh Me to Lie Down in Pastures of Tender Grass; He Leadeth Me Beside the Waters of Quietness**

Our attention is now directed to a particular phase of the shepherd's life, and here we see some of the ways in which he actually provides for his sheep day by day. For it is not enough that the shepherd has purchased his flock, by means however difficult and labors however loving; it is not sufficient that he have procured for them, in a general manner, all that they need for their life and safety, he must also arrange for their daily care and provide for their separate wants. Sheep, as we know, are delicate creatures, and they must be directed in their roamings, and sustained by sufficient nourishment. Accordingly, we have said that it belongs to the duties of a good shepherd to lead them out to pasture, and to provide for them every day adequate food and drink.

Here again we behold the infinite kindness of the Shepherd of our souls. Not alone has He deigned to stoop to our fallen state and restore us from death to life, not only did He take upon Himself our infirmities and bear our woes, but tenderly also has He provided for our constant direction, and for the daily needs of our lives.

The level to which the Saviour raised our lives and the dignity to which He invites us are far, indeed, above our natural powers. Left to ourselves, we could never attain the heavenly heights to which, in His goodness, He has called us. Through the infinite merits of His life and sacrifice we have been redeemed and reclaimed from the enemy of our souls; the gates of Heaven, closed against us before, have been opened wide; and our wayward race is again restored to the road that leads to our immortal home. But just because our celestial destiny is of so high and sublime a character, it is impossible, if left to our own abilities, that we should be able long to pursue it, and vastly beyond our sublimest hopes that we should ever finally attain it. We have, it is true, ever before us, the life and example of Him who has saved us; we know that His cross and death have delivered us from the wrath that frowned upon us. But we are weak and fragile mortals. With respect to

things of the higher life - of the supernatural world - we, of ourselves, shall always remain as helpless and frail as infants. Not less unable is the babe of yesterday to traverse unaided and explore the material world, than the wisest of men would be to know and grasp by his natural powers the unrevealed good of the immortal human spirit. And as, in our natural state, we could not know the true end of our existence, without a divine revelation, so likewise, we could not pursue and attain our spiritual destiny without special assistance from on high.

How well all this was known to our kind and kingly Shepherd! How keenly did He appreciate our frailty and inability to walk alone the paths which He had trodden! Not unmindful, therefore, was He constantly to teach and direct the way which leads to unending life. When going before his flock and teaching them by force of example, He did not omit to give them that saving doctrine which, when He had disappeared, would be their guide, and the guide to their future shepherds in the direction of safety and truth. Hence He propounded a teaching which should be to its obedient followers a realization at once of all He had promised them, and of all their heart's desires. Not that it would make them rich or great in the eyes of the world and according to human standards, but that it would confer a truer and a higher greatness by lifting them above their weak and natural level and preparing them for eternal blessedness.

Men had the Law before the coming of Christ; they knew the ten commandments. But the state to which the God-man called them, and the eminence to which they were raised, were quite beyond anything the world till then had ever been able to conceive. Human nature, under the New Covenant, was invited to attain to perfection. Things which before were thought impossible, were now to be the objects of our daily strivings. It was no longer an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; now not only was good to be done to those who were good to us, but to those also who did us evil; not only were we to love our friends, but to love and assist our enemies also; not only should evil deeds be avoided, but evil thoughts were likewise forbidden - yea, we were asked to be, in all our thoughts and deeds, imitators of the Shepherd who leads us. (Matthew 5:48)

Poor human nature, when raised so high above its natural powers, stood in perilous need of a shepherd's tender care. The new demands of every day made indispensable new and special daily helps. While our spirits can see and know the way, under the light of heavenly teaching, yet how weak and faltering is our flesh! We have the will to do; but to accomplish, we alone are not able. Therefore our Saviour said, "Of yourselves, you can do nothing, but in me all things are possible to you. The branches are nothing unless they abide in the vine; I am the vine, you the branches." (John 15:5) Thus He is our Leader, our divine Teacher and our source of strength. Without Him we can do nothing, but in Him we are strong. And daily and constantly He is near us, though we see Him not. It is He who sustains our very life and moves us to all that is good. Like an ever-present friend, He offers us constant assistance: He instructs and guides and helps us, and this is the strength and food of our souls. God's grace it is, always ready for our use, which makes possible all the high demands put upon our nature. Without it we should faint and starve on our journey, and hence He who has planned our high perfection, has provided the help to attain it. What are those seven wonderful sacraments which He has left us, but perennial channels of grace, constant fountains from which stream the life-giving waters that nourish our weary souls and make them strong for life eternal! Through these sacred means we are brought into contact with the life and merits of our Shepherd-Redeemer. They prolong His life and labors among us, they continue in our midst the strength of His sacred presence.

In a manner altogether special is this true of the Holy Sacrament of the altar. By the Holy Eucharist, Christ still is with us, and will so remain till the end of time, as really and as truly as He dwelt on earth in the days of His mortal life. Bound down as we are by the things of sense, we may, at times, be tempted to complain that Christ in this sacrament is all invisible to us. We can not see Him directly and immediately. His voice is silent and we do not hear Him; we do not feel the caress of His hand. But nevertheless we know He is present, for He has said it, and His word must remain, though heaven and earth should pass away. Even were we privileged to see the sacred humanity as it was seen of old in Palestine, we should not then, more than now in this sacrament, directly see the divinity concealed by the human frame. Faith then was required as well as now - faith in His sacred words, made evident by His sacred deeds. This is not strange; it is not too much to

ask. The same demand of faith is daily made upon us in much of our intercourse with our fellow mortals. Much that we do not clearly see we must perforce believe, else life would be impossible. The same, in a measure, is also true in all our human friendships. That which is most precious in our friends, that which is the source of life and beauty, of holy words and loving actions, of all we love and cherish in them, is the soul, the spirit that quickens and moves; and this we do not see.

Thus Christ in the Eucharist is truly present, though faith alone can apprehend Him. He requires of us this faith - this humble subjection of our sensible faculties to the power and truth of His words. It is all for our good that now He is hidden from our sight. He is not the less truly present, not less truly kind, not less loving, not less merciful and forbearing; but He wishes to exercise our faith, to prove our fidelity and trust in His teaching and promises, and hence He is hidden from the powers of our senses.

In the sacrament of the Eucharist the gracious Shepherd of our souls performs in particular three offices for us: He is our sacrifice, our silent patient friend, and in communion He becomes the actual spiritual food of our souls. As a victim He is daily and constantly, from the rising to the setting of the sun, lifted up for us in the holy sacrifice of the mass. The mass is the perpetuation of the sacrifice He offered long ago for our redemption. All the altars throughout the world, on which He is ever born and dies again in mystic repetition, are but an extension of the one great altar of Calvary, where first He gave His life for our salvation. And in this real and awful sacrifice, forever repeated in our midst, He pleads again our cause with God, the eternal Father. Again in a mystic manner He suffers for us, again He bleeds, again He is nailed to the cross and raised on high, and in that same abandoned, pitiable state, to which His love for His flock has reduced Him, ever and anon in our behalf He pleads: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do! (Luke 23:34) Holy Father, Powerful God, stay Thy avenging hand! and save the souls which Thou hast created for Thyself, and for which till the end of time I die!" He lifts, as it were, before the great white throne, His bruised and blood-stained hands, He shows those wounded feet, the scar of the spear in His sacred side; He points again to the agony in the garden, to the scourging at the pillar, to the cruel crown of thorns, to the weary way of the cross, and exclaims to Him who sits upon

the throne, "Behold, my Father, and see the price of my sheep, the tears and sorrow and blood they have cost me! and spare them and save them for the sake of Thy Son!"

Through the holy sacrifice of the mass, identical as it is with the sacrifice of Calvary, all the merits of Christ's life and death are applied to our souls. By His physical and bloody immolation on Calvary, Christ purchased for us infinite treasures of grace, and it is His will that these graces shall be dispensed to us, even till the end of the world, through the august sacrament of the altar. Moreover, except for the mass, we should not be blessed with the abiding actual presence of our divine Shepherd among us - that is, we should not possess Him in that special, intimate manner in which we now have Him in the Eucharist. For it is only in the mass that the sacred species are consecrated; and consequently it is through the mass alone that He takes up His sacramental presence in our midst and becomes our food in holy communion. He could, indeed, have ordained it otherwise, but such has been His blessed will, and such the condition in which we are placed by the direction of His holy Church.

Besides being our daily sacrifice, then, under the appearance of bread and wine, besides ever prolonging in our midst that wondrous act of Calvary by which at once He liberated our race and reopened to us the gates of Heaven, the bounteous Shepherd of our souls enters into the tabernacles of our churches, and there in silent patient waiting He craves the love of our hearts and longs for our intimate friendship. He is not content alone to plead for us with God, His Father; He is not content continually to renew in our presence the tragic mystery by which at the end of His earthly labors, He procured us every blessing - no, over and above these sovereign acts of kindest benediction, He wishes to remain among us, and to converse with us, each and all, as a friend would converse with his friend. This is what He meant when He said by the mouth of His inspired writer, "my delights are to be with the children of men." (Proverbs 8:31) As a Shepherd, His chiefest pleasure, as well as His supremest care, is to be with the flock He has purchased and loves. Yet it is a lonely life for our Shepherd-King, this abode in the silent tabernacle; but it is all for love of us. He wishes to be there where we can find Him, where we can come to Him at any hour and speak to Him, to praise and thank Him for all His dear and endless gifts, to

tell Him our needs and our sorrows, to open our breaking hearts to Him and reveal the secrets of our souls. This it is that He desires from us - the outpouring of our hearts and souls in His presence. This it is which renders unto Him that homage of faith and love and devotion that He came into the world to inspire. It will not do to say that, being God, He is acquainted with all our thoughts and aware of all our wants, for it is intimacy and confidence that He desires, the intimacy and confidence which alone can create a true and noble friendship. "I will call you no longer servants," He said to His disciples, "but I have called you friends; the servant knoweth not what his Master doth, but a friend is admitted to confidence." (John 15:15) Christ in the tabernacle is our friend; He has loved us unto the end, and He yearns for our love in return. Why is this? Why are we so precious in His eyes? What are we that the great Creator should at all be mindful of us? (Psalm 8:5) We must remember and ever bear in mind the lofty purpose which the Creator had in view when first He called us into being - the same purpose it was which prompted our redemption and all the gracious dispensations that have followed thereupon - namely, that God, while achieving His own eternal honor and glory, might communicate to us a portion of His own ineffable blessedness. We were made for God, and not for the world, or for creatures, or for ourselves. And precisely because we are the possession and property of God, He wants us, soul and body, for Himself; and in this blessed sacrament He calls to us individually, "Son, give Me thy heart;" (Proverbs 23:26) "come to Me, all you who are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matthew 11:28) "come to Me and find rest for your souls, I will lead you beside the waters of quietness."

But the excesses of our Shepherd's love and care do not stop with the altar and with the tabernacle. He is not satisfied with being our daily sacrifice and our abiding friend, not satisfied until He enters into our very bosom and unites us to Himself. Union with the beloved object and delight in its presence are characteristic of all true friendship, whether human or divine. That which we really love we desire to have, to possess, to be united with; and hence it is that Christ, the lover of our souls, has not only given His life to purchase us for Himself and Heaven, but has so extended His loving-kindness as to become Himself our actual food.

It is incomprehensible, in a human way, that the love of a shepherd for his flock, the love of God for His creatures, should be so extraordinary as to provide the wondrous benefits which Christ in the Eucharist has wrought for us. We simply cannot grasp with our feeble minds the prodigality of such enduring love. But the Saviour knew His purpose with us, and He knew the needs of our souls. As guests destined for an eternal banquet, and as heirs to celestial thrones, it is needful for us, amid the rough ways and perils of life, to be constantly reminded of our royal destiny and strengthened against our daily foes. This world of ours is an arena in which each one must contend for his eternal prize; and it is not possible, considering our natural frailty and the enemies that oppose our forward march, that we alone, without an added strength, should ever be able to win the battle of life.

Hence, as the body, to maintain its vigor and perform its work, needs its material and earthly food, so the soul, to live and be strong, must be nourished with the bread of Heaven. "The bread that I will give," said our Lord, "is my flesh for the life of the world. . . unless you eat of this bread you cannot have life in you. . . and he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath life everlasting, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:52,55)

In order, then, to sustain our spiritual life on earth and to make us strong for our daily conflicts, our heavenly Shepherd has left us a food which is none other than His own body and blood. What a prodigy of love! What could He do for us that He has not done? But, besides giving us strength, He had another purpose in becoming our food. Since He has chosen us for Himself, and has provided, in another world, eternal mansions for our souls, (John 16:2) He wishes to make certain, not only the happy issue of our lives, but our ever-increasing resemblance to Himself. He is therefore preparing us, He is fitting us, through communion in the Holy Eucharist, for our celestial home, and for visible companionship with Himself. Intercourse, communion, intimate relationship produce likeness, even here on earth, and it is a singular effect of Holy Communion that, unlike earthly food, it changes into itself all those who partake of it. Material, natural food becomes the substance of our flesh and blood, but frequent participation in the heavenly nourishment of Christ in the Eucharist transmutes our whole



being - our lives and thoughts and actions - into its own supernatural character.

Thus by living much with Christ on earth, by intimate converse with Him, by allowing Him to enter into our lives and thoughts, and shape our conduct and actions; and above all, by frequent and fervent communion with Him in the sacrament of His love, we become like unto Him, even here in our state of exile. And this likeness to Christ, which His faithful servants assume here below, is a foretaste of future blessedness; it is a preparation for the great reunion and the eternal banquet which await us in Heaven. Already we are led beside the waters of rest; we are directed to pastures of sweetest nourishment; and through the calm and vigor that reign in the soul we experience even now a taste of joys unseen.

## He Restoreth My Soul

Throughout the pastoral country of the Orient there are numerous places of great peril for sheep. There are also, here and there, private fields and vineyards and gardens into which, if a member of a flock should stray and be caught, it is forfeited to the owner of the land. Strange as it may seem, the sheep never learn to avoid these dangerous spots and forbidden places, and it behooves the shepherd to be ever on his guard for them, and to rescue them when wandering.

Here we cannot fail to observe the striking resemblance between this wayward tendency of the shepherd's flock and our own inclination and propensity to wander from God and things eternal. The world is full of occasions to evil; at every turn of the road on our journey through life there are fierce and crouching enemies who are waiting the chance to capture and bear us away. We know this; we have often been warned of the danger; too many sad experiences and breathless escapes have convinced us of the sundry perils to soul and body that lie along the way of life. But we, like senseless, erring sheep, if bereft of the Shepherd's guiding care, do not learn, in life's sad school, the way to keep free from harm. Though wounded repeatedly, and scarred and worn, and left, perhaps, without human aid, to waste and bleed our life away, we do not see the lurking evils; we do not discern beneath the mask the enemy whose purpose is ruin and death.

The creatures of the world, the things of sense take vicious hold of us, and often drag us to the very verge of perdition before we are aware. They come to us unprepared, and seek entrance into our lives and thoughts, and allure us by deception. They tell us that the world is fair and beautiful and full of promise; that God, for the moment, is not concerned; that the soul is secure and safe, and the body and its needs the only object of present solicitude. The process is gradual. The turning away and the loss are not at once and from the beginning of seductive influences, but slowly and unobtrusively in the guise of hope and high expectation. There is Ambition, with its glittering prospects, with its proffered rewards and castles of air. To the young man and young woman, just entering the arena of life, Ambition says, "Come and follow me, and I will crown you with glory and honor. I

will lift you above the common, beaten paths of men and seat you on a gilded throne. I will introduce you to my sister Pride, and we two will make you happy. Pride will teach you your true dignity, your place and position in the universe; she will remind you of your gifts and faculties, and enable you to battle with the weak and the strong; she will give you the secret of knowledge and train you to soar above your fellow-creatures and probe the mysteries of God and Heaven." Then Pleasure, with dimpled cheeks and laughing eyes, and words that sound like music to the ears, hurries out to greet the passers-by, and charms them by her shining gifts. "Make me your object and your end," she says, "and I will make you blessed. Forget your troubles and your cares, your fears of present and future ills; rejoice and be glad, eat, drink and be merry; indulge and drain to dregs the cups of sense, for this is all there is." Philosophy comes with another hope. "Drink deeply," she counsels, "at the spring of wisdom, and fear not God nor man; believe and trust in me, and I will steal away the sting of sorrow and pain; I will restore you to man's primeval state and land you safe on the shores of rest."

And when these deceivers - Ambition, Pride, Pleasure, and the like - have plundered and sacked their victim's goods, when these painted idols of a passing world have led away their worshippers as slaves, and stripped them of all they possessed, they give them over to evil habits and to masters that scourge and tear them. Like other prodigals, these pursuers of earthly phantoms take leave of their Father's house of comfort and plenty, they give up virtue, innocence, honesty, purity; they go into a far country to waste their substance living riotously, only to awake, soon at latest, to a land of famine, and to find themselves alone and in want. Instead of the honor and fame and high estate they sought to gain, instead of the escape from evil and pain and labor they hoped to find, they are sent into fields to minister to swine - the swine of their own degradation.

So, to a degree, it is with us, each and all, who listen to other voices and heed other calls than the voice and the call of God. If we prefer to stray to other fields and desert the pasture of our Shepherd, if we prefer a far country to our Father's home, if the world and its fleeting pleasures are more to us than God and His paternal rewards, then we must of necessity find ourselves at length in utter want and penury. It is this possibility of

deserting God, of seeking happiness outside of Him, of overturning the plans which He has made for our salvation, that gives us a vision of the awful failure of human life. The gifts of this world are by nature fleeting and fast-flying, and if we allow them to take the place of Him who made them, no matter how great our present boons, in spite of wealth and friends and all success, we have missed our chance and our purpose in the world, and can only have at last a desolate and a ruined life.

But how is it, then, one may ask, that man can be so deceived? How is it that we do not learn from others' disasters to avoid, every one of us, those deceiving, ruinous masters, those false gods that can lead us away from the one true Shepherd of our souls? It is, indeed, a curious fact that our deception is so easy. Surely a rational, intelligent being, who stops to consider, ought easily to distinguish between the great God of Heaven and the creatures of His hands. It ought not to be difficult for us to see the transient vanity of human things when compared with the eternal mansions. But the truth of the matter is, that we are deceived, we do not at all times see the objects of our choice as they really are objectively. Our vision is defective and blurred. If God stood out in our lives as He really ought to stand, if He occupied that place in our thoughts and plans which belongs to Him by right, it would not be possible that we should ever be led astray. And that God does not always hold in our lives the place which is His due is partly the result of our fallen nature; partly, therefore, in a way, excusable; but more frequently and chiefly from our own perversity - from wilful neglect of our highest duties.

The blindness and perversity of our nature, which have come from the wounds of original sin, make it easy for us, if we are neglectful and careless of our higher spiritual obligations, to mistake the false for the true, evil for good, the creature for the Creator. In the midst of the world and its allurements, it behooves us to be ever watching, if we are never to stumble and to fall. Had our nature never been corrupted by original unfaithfulness, had our first parents never turned away from God and transgressed His sacred precept, all our present ills would never have existed. But now it is different. We are born into the world a weakened people; each one of us has had an implicit part in the first transgression; we all, like erring sheep, have gone astray. And while this tendency to evil is part of our natural condition,

and therefore less imputable to us, it nevertheless is true that our actual sins and evil-doing are the work of our deliberate choice. If, at any time, we really turn away from God and break His law, it is because we have freely chosen so to act. The native perversity of nature in a normal man can never explain and excuse the grievous sins which he deliberately commits. It is only true that a weak and wounded nature leaves one less able to choose what is right, and more disposed to wrong. And since we know the state of things, since we know that the fault is really ours when we dare to stray to forbidden deeds and places, how constant and unrelenting, if we are truly wise, should be our efforts to keep our vision unobscured and our ears attuned to the voice and call of our heavenly Shepherd! We know that by following Him our way will be certain and clear. Howsoever enormous the evils of life, and notwithstanding all our weakness, we know that in Him we are safe and strong. But we must hear Him to follow Him, we must be guided and directed by His gracious commands.

This failure to hear and obey the voice of God it is which more explains the falls and sins of men than all their inherited frailty. So long as His words are heard and directions heeded, mistake and error are impossible. We see, therefore, why it is that so many actually do desert Him and are led by evil voices. The cause chiefly lies in the wilfulness of human nature and in the abuse of human liberty. We cannot stand unless God support us, and we shall surely fall if He withdraws His supporting hand. But the choice of evil, the beginning of unfaithfulness comes from ourselves; for Almighty God will never forsake us unless we first forsake Him.

If, ever, then, we find our lives to be at variance with God, whether in lesser or in greater matters, if it should ever be our unhappy fortune to wander from Him, like another prodigal, and waste our lives with the enemies of our souls, we can be assured that the desertion is all our own. We forget God, we deliberately wander from His sight and care, and then we fall. Engrossed in worldly affairs, taken up with present vanities, with ourselves, our ease, our temporal advancement, we begin to neglect prayer and communion with God, we begin to rely on ourselves and to forge ahead of our own accord, only to encounter complete defeat and be shorn of all our strength. The secret of our power and success is to keep close to Him, to

Speak to Him lovingly and often, to seek guidance and protection from Him, and habitually to live in His comforting presence.

But such is the boundless kindness of our heavenly Shepherd that, no matter how often we may have wandered from Him, or how seriously we may have grieved Him, He is ever ready to pursue our wanderings, and to seek until He finds us. He does not stop to consider the enormity of our guilt, or our unreasonableness, or our ingratitude, but He seeks us. He does not pause to take an account of all He has done for us, of the many graces He has given us, of the tears and blood He has shed in our behalf; but He goes after our straying souls, and He will not be appeased until He restore us. God does not will the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9) He knows all our frailties and our diverse temptations; He knows how alluring are the things of sense to a nature perverted like ours; He knows how easy it is for us, blind and ignorant as we are, to forget Him and our dearest interests, and to obey the call of other voices; all this He understands, and He has pity on us. "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." (Psalm 102:14)

To bring us back, therefore, when wandering, and to restore us to the circle of His chosen flock, our Saviour has made ample provision. Through those divine mediums of grace - the sacraments of His Church - He has arranged to succor all our wants and to cure our various infirmities. The sacraments of Baptism and Penance, in particular, were instituted to raise our souls from death to life, and to heal our spiritual wounds. Baptism may be aptly compared to the door of the sheepfold. It is the gate through which men must enter into the fold of Christ, it is the entrance to His Church. It clears away the guilt and stain of original sin, and restores the soul from a state of enmity to the friendship and grace of God. None can really belong to Christ, none can be of His true fold who have not entered by way of the door, who have not been baptized. Many there are who pretend to belong to Him and think themselves of the number of His flock; they speak of Him as their Master and Shepherd; they pretend to be doing His work; they call Him Lord and preach in His name; but they have not entered by the door of the sheepfold, and He knows them not. Like thieves and robbers, they have climbed up some other way, and they neither know Him, nor does He know

them, neither can they understand His voice. Baptism is the entrance, it is the door, to the fold of Christ.

And as it is through Baptism that our bountiful Lord first recalls us from the ways of sin and makes us members of his flock, so in the sacrament of Penance He has provided a means by which we may at all times be recalled from our wanderings and restored to His friendship. Penance is an inexhaustible means of reconciliation between the erring soul and God. It lasts throughout our lives, it stretches even to the end of time. If only we are men of goodwill and have at heart our eternal interests, we need not be disturbed at our frailty, or at repeated lapses into sin. There is no sin which cannot be forgiven by the sacrament of Penance. Not that anyone, knowing that he can be forgiven, should presume to abuse God's gracious sacrament, and yield freely and without restraint to the voice of sin; nor that we are not to be truly sorry to the end of our days for having even once offended our benign Maker and Redeemer; but we must be confident that, whatever may have been our faults and failings, however prolonged and extraordinary our transgressions, if we approach the sacrament of Penance with sincere sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment, God will always lovingly receive us back to Himself, and remember no more our unfaithfulness. God hates sin, because it is opposed to Himself and is the only evil in the world, but He loves the wounded sinner who is made in His own image and likeness. Precious in the sight of God is the penitent sinner. Does He not tell us Himself that, like a good shepherd, He leaves ninety-nine just to go in search of one lost sheep? Yea, He assures us that there is rejoicing among the angels of Heaven over one sinner who does penance. (Luke 15:4,7)

To make worthy use of the sacrament of Penance we must be truly sorry for having offended God, and be resolved, at the time of confession, to do what lies in our power never again to turn away from Him. To these dispositions must also be joined the intention of doing something to repair the injury which sin has done to God. Given such conditions, and we need only speak the word to God's duly appointed minister and our sins are no more. The dark veil which hung around the soul like a cloud is lifted, and we again rejoice in the smile of our heavenly Father. How simple, yet how potent are the means provided for our salvation! None but God could have thought of them, nothing but the love of God could have arranged them!

But even before the sinner is brought to penance, even while he is wandering and reveling afar off in the vile delights of sin, God is pursuing him, God is seeking after him, calling him by name, whispering to his heart, disposing him for repentance. We cannot return to God, once we have deserted Him, without His help. It is our awful power to be able to leave Him, but to return alone we are not able. Wherefore He comes after us when we have wandered into the wilds of sin; He pleads as it were, with our souls, and offers us the grace to repent. Oh privileged are our souls to be thus appraised by God, and happy those who hear and heed the appealing voice of His grace!



## **He Leadeth Me in the Paths of Justice for His Name's Sake**

The shepherd country of the East is full of walks and pathways, some leading this way, some that. Some lead to dangerous precipices over which the sheep might fall and be lost, others would expose them to the attack of wild beasts, while still others would lead them so far astray that they could not find their way back. It is, therefore, always needful that the shepherd go ahead of his flock and lead them in the right path. The Psalmist, in the title of the present chapter, is applying this carefulness of the shepherd for his sheep to our Lord, in His regard for our spiritual welfare. The Saviour goes before us with the blessings of His goodness to help and lead us aright, lest perchance we become lost and perish in our journey.

This solicitude of our Redeemer in providing for the various needs of our souls is characteristic of Him as Saviour. It is implied in the meaning of his name. Before He was born, before He was conceived in His Mother's womb, it was foretold of Him that He should be called Jesus, which means Saviour, for He would save His people from their sins. (Luke 1:31) He exercised, as we know, this mission of saviour throughout His earthly career. It was for this that He came into the world, for this that He was born in Bethlehem with a manger as His cradle, for this that, at the age of twelve, He was found teaching in the Temple, for this that He retired to Nazareth and was subject to Mary and Joseph, for this that He labored and suffered and bled and died. And with His passing from this visible scene to the bosom of His Father, He did not cease to be that for which He had been eternally anointed - the great High Priest, the Mediator between God and man, the Saviour of the world. His work is everlasting; and now that He has gone up on high, He pleads for us ever more with the Father. We belong to Him, He has purchased us with His blood, and He must needs care for our safety to the end.

Inasmuch as we are heirs, according to divine decree, to thrones beyond the skies, it was necessary, as we have seen, that He who is our Saviour and Shepherd should have left behind Him in this world of ours a doctrine, a

code, or system of instructions and laws, which should safely direct and guide us to our royal destiny. Those who lived with Him on earth, those who heard His assuring, life-giving words, and felt the inspiration of His example and visible presence needed not to fear for the direction or safety of their course. The divine, living voice and sacred presence of their Lord and Master they enjoyed, and care and anxiety fled from their souls. But not for these alone had the Redeemer come, but for all mankind, for all who in future were to breathe the breath of human life. He came to save all, He died for all; and thus the teaching which He gave to the world, and which He committed to His chosen followers, was for every human being, even to the end of the world, that through it all might live and attain to life everlasting.

The doctrine which the Saviour left us, and the laws which He prescribed were vastly different from the teachings of men. Guiding, saving words of a Shepherd to his flock, they engendered safety, comfort, peace. Free from error or mistake, sealed with the seal of Heaven, holding out a promise of future glory, they exhaled the perfumes of the eternal city, they told of mansions not built with hands. And since this immaculate doctrine, given for the souls of men, was to last till the end of time, there was need that it should be shielded against the assaults of the world and protected from the influence of our changing human teachings. It could not be corrected, because it contained no mistakes; it could not be changed or altered, because it came from the changeless God; it could have no substitute from the part of men or creatures of any kind, because it was given by Him who alone was the way, the truth, and the life. Consequently the truths which the Saviour declared to the world as the only means by which we can be saved, were at once infallible in themselves, and so provided for that no human agency, no lapse of years or revolutions of time and place should ever be able to infringe on their eternal, changeless character. It was to preserve these truths in their integrity and freshness that He founded His unerring Church and committed to it the office of custodian and expounder, under the guidance of His Holy Spirit, of all He had revealed for the salvation of human kind. Hence to hear our Shepherd's voice, to understand what He says to us, to know what we must do to obey His laws and save our souls, we need but listen to the voice of His Church. Before it was established He declared that He should build His Church upon a rock, and that no enemy,

or group of enemies, not even the gates of hell should ever prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18) He established the Church as His mouthpiece, and He said to the little band that constituted it in the beginning, "he that heareth you, heareth me, and he that heareth me, heareth Him that sent me;" (Luke 10:17) and, as if to emphasize this declaration, He added that any one who would not hear and obey the Church should be considered as a heathen and a publican - types of all that was bad. (Matthew 18:17) The Church, therefore, is the oracle of God, it is His mouthpiece; it possesses and guards the only revelation which God has made to His rational creatures; it alone has the words of eternal life.

Thus it is that our divine Shepherd goes before us, leading us in the paths of truth and justice, preserving us from danger and error with respect to our spiritual destiny. We cannot go astray if we listen to Him speaking to us through His church. In all our perplexities and uncertainties, when confronted by any doubt, or confused and distracted by the wrangling voices and conflicting opinions of men, we can be calm and at peace, assured in our inmost souls that the voice which guides us cannot err, that it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one word of His to fail. (Matthew 24:35)

He leadeth me in ways of justice, in the ways of holiness, in the ways which the saints have walked. How exceeding great, indeed, is our privilege, and how certain and individual our election! All that remains to us is to listen to His words and to follow Him, and present peace will attend our labors, while future glory waits upon our end.

But in the midst of abundant blessings and spiritual favors which have surrounded and sheltered us from infancy, we are apt to be unmindful of our state of plenty and forgetful of the duty of gratitude. We are apt to venture out like thoughtless children, trusting in our own strength to battle with the foe; or else, on the contrary, we sluggishly presume that a bountiful Providence will provide for us regardless of our own co-operation. We have never known what it is to want for spiritual food and spiritual direction, except when indolence, careless indifference, and our own folly have led us astray. These are evils which continually assail us, and we often make friends with them, not knowing what we are doing for the most part, until

the blood of life has almost ebbed away. We are not, indeed, removed from a world where sin abounds and where deceiving voices may allure us this way and that. Like the pastoral country of the Orient, the walks of life are fraught with perils: false teachers, false doctrines, false prophets, pseudo-christs; (Matthew 24:24) "perils from our own nation, and perils from abroad, perils in the city and perils in the wilderness, perils in the sea and perils from false brethren" (2 Corinthians 11:26) - all trying to attract and lead us away from the paths of justice and deliver us to the enemy of our souls.

It is necessary that we should know that wolves are abroad in sheep's clothing; "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:13) They come to us with winning words and easy teachings, with new creeds, new forms of belief, new ways to the promised land.

The doctrine and truths which Christ taught and which He entrusted to His Church are set aside or explained away by these modern teachers, and the novel and the strange are made to assume the role of the old, the familiar and the true. The harm done is incalculable. How many innocent and unwary sheep have been lost to the fold of Christ by following the call of these unworthy preachers and false shepherds! What multitudes of precious souls have been deceived by their polished words and led away into paths of error, into deadly ways of thinking, believing, and acting, never to return to the path that leads to life!

This poisoning of the soul and the heart by erroneous doctrines is effected in many and diverse ways; the victims of falsehood are variously captured. There are the wisdom and sagacity of men, there are the conquests of science and the learning of the philosophers, the discoveries of our day, the strides of history, the breakdown and overthrow of many things held sacred by our forefathers - and all these changes and ruptures in the order of a former generation are now used to beguile the flock of Christ and sway them from the paths of truth and righteousness. But amid all this din and uproar of conflicting voices, amid the wrangling tumult and confusion of converging opinions, those who will may hear and discern the loving voice of the true Shepherd speaking to the world through His Church with the

same calm, assuring words which He uttered to living witnesses two thousand years ago. He has not changed, neither has His teaching; He has not deserted His chosen flock, but is with it all days, even to the end of the world. (Matthew 28:20) His love for us, His watchfulness for our needs, His enduring care for our interests, in spite of our enemies, can never fail.

And while assured of this, it behooves us also, as appealing to our sense of gratitude, and as inducing to greater love of Him, to reflect that this abiding faithfulness of our Saviour in caring for our wants is not from any worthiness of ours, or because of our merits, but only for His Name's sake, because He is Saviour. It was His love for us that prompted our creation, His love that provoked His passion and redeemed us, His love that made Him suffer for us, His love that teaches and shall guide us to life everlasting, for His love endureth forever.

## **Yea, Though I Walk in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I Will Fear no Evil, for Thou Art With Me**

Besides the paths and dangerous walks in the shepherd country that would lead the sheep to destruction and death, there are other paths all encompassed with evils through which, nevertheless, they are at times obliged to make their way. Safety from all harm there cannot be for the shepherd's flock. They must in their journeys encounter many perils, even while pursuing the proper paths. There are deep and darksome valleys, walled round on all sides by towering rocky hills, which at times the shepherd cannot easily escape. And within these shadowy valleys and somber ravines there dwell not infrequently wild and ferocious animals that will, if aroused, attack and kill the tender sheep. The utmost care and caution of the shepherd are called into service safely to conduct his dependent flock through these places of deepest peril. But in spite of all his watchfulness it sometimes happens that a wolf will get into the very midst of the sheep. The timid, terrified animals become wild with fright, and are scattered, running this way and that, until the shepherd calls and bids them collect together. No sooner do they hear his voice, than they all rush swiftly together in a solid mass, and either drive the enemy from their midst or cripple and crush him to death.

Thus in times of greatest peril the shepherd protects his sheep, and wrests them from the jaws of harm. The sheep know this, and they fear no evils; they know that their master is with them. Yea, though they walk in the shadow of perils and dwell in the midst of the valley of death, they faint not, neither do they fear, for they know that the shepherd is near.

The case of the sheep in the valley of perils is not unlike our own in the midst of the evils of the world; and the peace and safety which we enjoy should be similar also to theirs. We are assured, first of all, by an unflinching faith in God and our Redeemer that, if we trust our Master and obey Him, we shall be led aright throughout our lives, even to the kingdom of Heaven. We shall be led in the paths of justice and love, and crowned at length with the crown of glory, if we but follow the voice of our Shepherd-

King, and avoid the walks of disaster and ruin. And to hear His voice and to know it we have but to listen to the teachings of His Church, which will hush to silence our troubled hearts, and direct our wayward feet into the paths of heavenly peace.

But, like the shepherd's flock, we have to avoid in our journey through life, as perils to our safety and spiritual welfare, not only the false shepherds and teachers and doctrines that surround us on all sides; but we must also, to pass to our reward, actually encounter inevitable evils and fight many necessary battles. Many of the paths of life through which we must of necessity pass are hard and difficult, and full of deadly perils. We must remember that sin has ruined the primeval beauty of our earthly habitation and made our life here below a labor and a toil to the end.

We not only come into the world with sin on our souls, and are thereby exiles from the city of God, but even when our sin is forgiven us the remains of the malady continue as wounds in our nature as long as we live on earth. The deadly guilt is wiped away, but the effects of the evil remain. And it is chiefly these wounds of our nature, in ourselves and in others, that render life's journey, even when pursued in accordance with the law of God, at times truly difficult and perilous. Fidelity to God and to His law is not always a safeguard against the wickedness of the world and of men; at times, in fact, it is just the contrary. Indeed, is it not a truth that many, perhaps the majority, of those who endeavor sincerely to please and to serve God must often suffer severely for their very goodness and faithfulness? Are they not misunderstood, and criticised, and censured? Are they not frequently accused of all manner of wrong, their work disparaged, and their motives impugned? Are not persecution, and even martyrdom, often their portion? Now all this is the result of sin. Those who call into question the deeds and motives of God's saints; those who upbraid, and criticise, and impute evil to the sincere, faithful servants of God, inflicting upon them dire evils, are but showing the effects of sin in themselves, are but giving exercise to the evil that rules within them. Their particular acts and words may be without present malice, they may be inwardly persuaded that in reviling and condemning their neighbor and doing him harm, they are rendering a service to God Himself; but in so doing they but manifest the effects of earlier sin, personal, perhaps, and original, which has darkened

their understanding and made perverse their moral vision, so that, having eyes, they see not, having ears, they hear not, neither do they understand. (Psalm 113:13,14) Following the corruption of their own nature, bleeding from the wounds of original sin, they are prone to blaspheme whatsoever they fail to comprehend; (Jude 10) and thus it is that they often make life and the world for the servant of God a truly perilous sojourn, a veritable valley of death.

This failure to be understood, this misjudgment of actions, motives, deeds, are doubtless common evils from which, in a measure, we all must suffer. But it is also true that the more elevated the life, the higher its aims, the loftier the spiritual level on which it proceeds, the greater the difficulty of its being understood and appreciated by the majority, who always tread the common paths of mediocrity. A saint is nearly always a disturbance to his immediate surroundings, he is frequently an annoyance and an irritation to the little circle in which his external life is cast, simply because he really lives and moves in a sphere which the ordinary life cannot grasp. Like a brilliant, dazzling light that obscures the lesser luminaries, and is therefore odious to them, the man of God is frequently a disturber to the worldly peace of common men, his life and works are a living reproach to their life and works; and hence, without willing it, he becomes a menace to their society and is not welcome in their company. Worldly, plotting minds cannot understand the spiritual and the holy; sinful souls are out of harmony with the virtuous; the children of darkness cannot find peace with the children of light. And not only is there a lack of sympathy in the worldly-minded for the men and women who are led of God, but there is often positive hatred for them - a hatred which spends itself in actual, persistent persecution. To be devout, to refrain from sinful words and sinful deeds, to shun the vain and dangerous amusements of worldlings, to attend much to prayer and recollection, to love the house and worship of God, to be seen often approaching the sacraments and partaking of the bread of life at the communion rail - even these holy acts are sufficient frequently to draw down on the servants of God the curse and persecution of a world which knows not what it does.

And that which happens individually to the faithful children of God takes place on a larger scale with respect to God's Church. The children of this



world, those who have set their heart on temporal things, or who, through wilful error have deviated from the right path to things eternal, never cease from pursuing and persecuting the Church of God. They hate the Church and attack it unceasingly. Like the perverse and blinded Jews of old who reviled the Saviour and His words and deeds, who pursued Him and put Him to death, these ever-living and ever-active enemies of light and truth never abate in their fury against the chosen friends of Christ, and against His holy Church. But need we be surprised at this? Was it not foretold? Did not our blessed Shepherd, speaking in the beginning to His little flock, warn them that men would deliver them up in councils and scourge them? Did He not say to them plainly, "And you shall be hated by all men for my name's sake; but he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved. And when they persecute you in this city, flee into another.... The disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the good man of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household." (Matthew 10:17,22-26)

It happens, therefore, that fidelity to God, and careful adherence to the paths of justice and holiness, can frequently be the occasion of perils and sufferings for us individually, as they also are the excuse for a vaster persecution of the Church in general. All holy persons and holy things are signs of contradiction. They are not of the world, they do not fit in with it; and between them and the world there will be strife and contention until the renovation comes.

But the enemies that lie along the ways of life, that beset and threaten even the most righteous paths of our pilgrimage, are not all from without - the most numerous and menacing are perhaps from within. "The enemies of a man," says the inspired writer, "are those of his own household." (Micah 7:6; Matthew 10:36) That is to say, the most potent evils which we suffer, the chiefest foes to our present and future welfare are from ourselves - our own waywardness, our tendencies to evil, our wilfulness, our self-love and self-seeking, our own sins. It is from these and like causes that we suffer most. Hard and trying it surely is to bear persecutions and contradictions from others; severe is the strain to nature when, in the face of our noblest efforts, proceeding from noblest motives, we meet with misunderstanding

and even condemnation; but to the upright, religious heart that is sincerely and truly seeking God amid the shadows and pitfalls of life, the sorest of all trials and the fiercest of all enemies are one's own temptations and passions and inclinations to evil. Easier it were to conquer the whole external world of foes, than to reign supreme over the little world within. Of Alexander the Great it is said, that while he actually subdued the whole known world of his time, he nevertheless yielded in defeat before his own passions. He could overcome his external enemies, but surrendered miserably in the battle with self.

This, then, is our greatest warfare, the struggle with ourselves; and this our greatest victory, a triumph over self. "If each year," says the Imitation, "we could uproot but one evil inclination, how soon we should be perfect men!" (Bk. i. 11. 5) But it is not for us to be free from enemies and perils, both from without and from within, during our earthly sojourn. They are a part of our lot here below, they are necessarily bound up with the darkened regions through which the Shepherd must lead his flock; and hence, entire safety there shall never be before the journey's end, until we say farewell to present woes, and hail "the happy fields, where joy forever dwells."

In our present state, therefore, it is important for us to realize our dangers and to be prepared for conflict. There is no way of escape from crosses, and perils, and dreadful battles for all those who wish to win the crown of victory. They must follow the Shepherd as he leads the way, and hence our Lord has said, "if any man will come after me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) Yes, it is the following of the Shepherd, it is his leadership, his constant presence, that give comfort to the sheep, and dispel the dread and fear of perils. And though we pass through the valley and shadow of death, we need fear no evil, for He is with us. At times, frequently perhaps, as we sail the sea of life, the waves roll over and deluge us so completely that we are all but smothered. The clouds gather, thick and black, and overcast the sky of our souls; the sorrows of death surround us, and the pains of the pit encompass us; (Psalm 17:4,5) we are overwhelmed with sadness and plunged in darkness. We think of God, we remember Him, but He seems afar off. The evil which weighs us down - the pain of body, the agony of soul, the sadness and dejection of heart and mind, "the madness that worketh in the brain," muffle the voice and all but

still the trembling pulse, and we are not able so much as to lift our drooping heads and tear-dimmed eyes to see the gentle Shepherd standing faithfully at our side. It is our failure to discern and apprehend Him that causes extreme agony. If at these times of utter desolation, when the soul is swept by the winds of sorrow, we could only raise our eyes and thoughts to Him, with faith and hope and child-like trust, the spell would be broken; and we should see the clouds lift and part and float away on the wind, only to let in God's cheerful sun to raise the drooping spirit, and warm and soothe the troubled soul.

But it is difficult, when oppressed by sorrow and affliction, to lift the heart and mind to things above. Nature of itself tends downward, and unless it has learned to discipline itself and to engage with the enemy in sturdy battle, it is not yet prepared for life. For the world is a battlefield and life a warfare, even from a natural point of view, and only they can hope to win in life's hard contest who have learned to brave the battle, who have prepared themselves for conflict. But who is ready for the struggle, and how shall we be able to encounter our foes? Left to ourselves and to our own resources, we shall surely go down in defeat. The opposing forces are too gigantic, too numerous. They throng from near and from afar. They swarm from within and from without; from our own nature and from others, from the world around, and from our own household; from those at home, and from them that are abroad. Frequently during life we are, of a certainty, encompassed round with perils; we hardly know where to turn or what to do, we are breathless with fright; but even then, if we have proper faith, we shall grow calm, like the shepherd's flock in the midst of devouring animals and beasts of prey, for our Saviour and Shepherd is with us, and no evil can befall us. Even when we think Him farthest, He is often nearest; when we think Him sleeping, His heart is watching. He loves us, His weak and timid sheep; we are the objects of His heart's affection and ever active solicitude; He will not let perish, if we trust Him, the price of His precious Blood.

And the training we are to receive, and the preparation we are to make, in order worthily and victoriously to engage in the battle of life are nothing, therefore, but lessons of love and trust in the constant goodness and faithfulness of our divine Saviour. Unless we viciously drive Him away by deliberate, grievous sin, He is really never absent from us, and least of all

when we need Him most. It is our fault, if we do not by faith discern Him, if we do not feel His ever-gracious presence. We need to discipline ourselves in acts and deeds of faith and love, and then we shall realize that He is always near us, even in the darkness of the shadow of death.

We must try to know our Shepherd, first of all; we must endeavor intimately to understand Him. For to have faith in Him, to trust Him, to believe in His power and goodness, in His overruling care for us and our interests, presuppose a knowledge of Him, just as faith and confidence in an earthly friend follow upon an intimate acquaintance with that friend. But this close knowledge of our Master, so necessary to our present peace and future happiness, will never be ours unless we make Him our confidant, unless we accustom ourselves to live in His presence, to look to Him, to speak to Him often, to listen to His gracious direction. And this intimate relationship with our Saviour, this habitual communion with Him, will enkindle in our souls the fire of love. Once we know Him, we will trust Him, and having faith and confidence in Him, we will link our poor lives to His divine life by the strong cords of heavenly charity. Fear and uncertainty will then be impossible, even in the darkest hours.

It is love, above all, that directs our life - love, indeed, which is born of knowledge. We do not, it is true, love anything before we have some knowledge of it; this would be an impossibility; but once the soul has caught the vision, it is love that drives the life and stimulates and enriches the knowledge. The objects of our affections are the interpreters of our life and actions. If we love the world, we are led by the world; if we love God, it is God that leads and directs us. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also; (Luke 12:34) and where the heart is, thither will the life make its way. But if God is the object of our love, we shall fear no evil; for "God is charity," says Saint John, "and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him ... Fear is not in charity; but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain." (1 John 4:16,18)

It is only the love of God, therefore, that will steady our lives, and bear us up in the thick of tribulations. It is the confident assurance that we, although so unworthy, are the objects of divine complacency that awakens in our hearts a return of burning charity, and enables us to say, with the Psalmist,

when the day is darkest "The Lord is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 26:1,2) We are not to fear men, said our Lord, who, when they have destroyed the body, can do no more; (Matthew 10:28) neither shall we be in dread of our Master, if armed with the gift of His love, "for fear hath pain, but love casteth out fear." Rather shall we, like the martyrs of old, mindful of the gift of God, go bravely forth to the battle of life, or to the slaughter, calmly, hopefully, cheerfully. While humbly, but steadfastly trustful of the Shepherd that leads us, we shall not be disturbed or troubled; the present shall be shorn of its terrors, the future of its forebodings. This truly is the triumph of life, when love, not fear, has come to rule us. This is the broader, larger life - the forerunner of life eternal in which our days are passed in calm serenity - in which we press on with undaunted tread, alike under frowning clouds, or under a star-lit sky; alike with the joys of friendship around us, or alone amidst the graves of the dead.

We must not infer from this that the love of God which is our strength, the source of our courage, will blunt our feelings or harden our lives. It does not seal up the fountain of tears, or make us insensible to the pains and sorrows of life, which belong to the lot of all. In a certain sense it is likely true that those suffer most in life who are most united to God; for they feel most the coldness of the world and its desolation, its want of love and sympathy, its degradation and its misery. Hence it would be a mistake to think that the friends of God in this life are either exempted from pain and sorrow, or made insensible to them, either in themselves or in others. Of these and other evils they are truly more keenly aware than worldly men, if for no other reason than because of the superior refinement of their nature and the spiritual outlook of their vision. It is sin, after all, that hardens while it weakens. Sin closes the heart to love, it renders its victims cold, unsympathetic and selfish; whereas the gifts of grace and holiness are tenderness, mercy, strength. But though all have to suffer, both the holy and the unholy, the difference between them is this, that the ungodly are borne down and overcome by their sorrows and crosses, while the spiritual are always triumphing even in the midst of apparent defeat. To the foolish they seem to be vanquished, yet they conquer; often they seem on the verge of surrender, when they emerge in victory; they seem to die, when behold they live! (Wisdom 3:3)

The spiritual man, then, does suffer; he suffers in the cause of God; he suffers for others and for himself. More than this, it is doubtless true that he feels his crosses more keenly, he grieves more profoundly, than do the children of the world; but through it all he remembers his Saviour and is comforted. He knows that the tribulations of the just are many, and that from all these the Lord will soon deliver him, (Psalm 33:20) and he shall not be confounded forever.

## **Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Comfort Me**

It is already plain to us that the sorrows and sufferings of the present life are, without doubt, the result and consequence of sin. That we should pass our mortal days so full of pain and tears, that our fellow-man, that the beasts of the field and the elements, which we need and use as helpers and servants, and most of all that our own nature, with its passions and evil tendencies, should rise up against us and oppose us, was assuredly not a part of the original plan. As a wise and all-powerful Designer and Creator, God founded the world after a masterful fashion - devoid of evil, free from defect, perfect according to the plans framed in Heaven. The hills and mountains He founded and set on their bases; the streams and rivers and valleys He formed, all rich and lovely, intended for the comfort and happiness of man; the blue deep He constructed and beautified with its millions of shining wonders; and in all these stupendous creations, in all the diverse works of His mighty, omnipotent hands there was in the beginning no trace of fault, of defect, of error or sin. The upheaval came when man disobeyed and wrought the commencement of all our woe. And hence it is to man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree, that we owe all the evils from which our nature suffers and to which our flesh is heir.

But although we know the source of our sorrows and feel the guilt of our sins, this does not make our burden lighter or shorten the path of our pilgrimage. We are confronted by the problem of labor and suffering as soon as we enter the world. No one is entirely exempted; and, strange as it is, we see that it frequently happens, that those are most afflicted who are farthest removed from the wickedness of the world and purest in the sight of God. "Many are the tribulations of the just;" and how true is it that the very fidelity of the servants of God is often an occasion of their sufferings! It is not wonderful that sorrow and fear should be the portion of sinners throughout the length of their days, for "contrition and unhappiness are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known;" (Psalm 13:3) but that all, even the saints of God, should suffer alike and be oppressed with miseries is, at first sight, a problem and a baffling mystery.

It is something, indeed, to feel in our suffering that we are paying the debt of our sins, whether personal, or original, or both; it is much to know that our crosses, severe and inevitable as they are, are a curb to our wayward nature, and a restraint against further sins; it is assuredly a great privilege and a high honor that we, unworthy and unfaithful servants of our Master, should, through our tears and sorrows and sufferings, be enabled to conform our poor lives to the tearful and sorrowful life of our Saviour; it is a comfort that words cannot tell to be assured by our faith that in the midst of pains and perils the Shepherd of our souls is ever near to shield, to guard, and to save - all this is surely much - enough to encourage and strengthen us daily to take up our cross and joyfully follow our Redeemer, even to the hill of Calvary, even to the death of the cross. But this is not all. A deeper meaning lies hidden behind the veil of tears, beneath the cloak of pain and sorrow. The miseries of life are not a mere inheritance, neither is their value of a purely negative character. We instinctively feel that somehow, somewhere beyond the scope of mortal ken, there is a higher explanation and a more valid justification for all the failures and pains and sorrows of life, than that which appears on the surface of things, or issues in results that are only negative. Suffering for its own sake was never intended; and we were not made to suffer. We were not created for misery, but for happiness; not for failure, but for victory; not for death, but for life; not for time, but for eternity. And hence there is a deeper meaning, a higher explanation for all the failures and miseries of the present life than those that are apparent to the casual observer.

In the title of this chapter the Psalmist, referring to the shepherd's care for his sheep, says: "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." The staff the shepherd uses, as already explained, is to assist the sheep along their perilous journeys, and the rod to protect them in case of attack. The rod and the staff are necessary for the welfare of the flock, necessary to guide and shield them in their wanderings, and to bring them safely home. So too, it is with us, the children of God. To be properly protected and guided to our happy end we have need of the rod of affliction and adversity, and likewise of the staff of mercy.

Although human miseries - pain, poverty, suffering and death - are, as we know, the consequences, just and equitable, of original sin, it is a



shortsighted faith and a defective vision that find in these crosses only chastisement for sin. Truly, they should not have been, had we never sinned; but as God, in His mercy, draws good out of evil, so has He made these inevitable results of our transgression serve a higher purpose and minister to noble ends. The Saviour came that we might have life, that we might progress and advance to ever fuller and more abundant life. (John 10:10) His aim, and the aim and purpose of His heavenly Father, since the very dawn of our creation, has been to lead us to happiness - to perfect, abundant, eternal happiness. It would be of little account to be happy here, unless we are also to rejoice eternally. It would be a poor exchange and a paltry satisfaction, to be present at the feasts of men, only to forfeit our place at the banquet of angels. But our heavenly reward and our celestial crown are to be merited and won here below; they are to follow upon our earthly labors. "Only he shall be crowned," says Saint Paul, "who has legitimately engaged in the battle." (2 Timothy 2:5) And did not the Master say Himself, "Let him who wishes to come after me deny himself and take up his cross and follow me?" (Luke 9:23) Did He not declare that we must die to live? that we must surrender our life here, if we would keep it eternally? "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal." (John 12:24) We cannot serve two masters, we cannot serve God and mammon. If we would seek to avoid all pain and sorrow, and spend our lives in the pleasures of sense, we must be prepared to forego the future joys of the soul; if we would pass our days indulging the flesh and chasing the phantoms of time, we must needs make ready for the death of the spirit and the forfeit of all that is lasting.

We have no choice, then; if we would succeed eternally, we must follow the way of the cross. This is the only way to life - to that abundant, celestial life which our Creator has wished us to live. And it is the bearing of our cross, patiently and resignedly to the will of God, together with our other good works, that enables us to merit, in so far as we can, the joys of the kingdom of Heaven. But the sufferings and labors, so inevitable and necessary to our earthly state, which serve as a means to supernal rewards, have still another, deeper meaning, and serve another purpose. We cannot evade them, we must encounter them. They are not only unavoidable, but necessary to our

dearest interests, as we see, since they are strewn as thorns and brambles all along the narrow way that leads to eternal life. We cannot choose them or lay them aside at will. We may, indeed, if we be foolish and impious enough, refuse to walk the narrow way of the just and choose the broad road that leadeth to destruction; but we shall not even thus escape the pains and perils inseparable from this mortal life. Or again, we may, in our folly, rebel against the crosses and labors that confront and pursue us; but whether we go this way or that, whether we will it or not, we can no more eschew all the evils of life than escape from the air that we breathe. The pressure, it is true, is not always upon us; we are not, without ceasing, weighed down by our labors and groaning to be delivered from the body of this death. There is interruption, there is passing pleasure, a rift in the clouds and a smile of the sunshine even for the darkest and poorest life. And yet withal, we know and we are conscious that we are ever under the sentence of death, that life is a fleeting shadow, that like

"A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,  
Man passes from life to his rest in the grave."

There is no evading the conclusion, therefore, that the days of man in this world are few and full of miseries. "The life of man upon earth is a warfare, and his days are like the days of a hireling. He cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow." (Job 7:1; Job 14:2) "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass is withered, and the flower thereof is fallen away." (Isaiah 40:6,7) To the natural man all this is appalling, and how frequently it finds its solution in unbridled self-indulgence, in mental unbalance, and self-destruction! But the saints, and all the truly wise, have viewed the problem of human suffering in a vastly different light. They have discerned it, first of all, as really distinctive of the road to Heaven, and as essentially pertaining to the royal way of the cross. They have understood that it extinguishes the wrath of the heavenly Father, that it atones for sin and makes the soul conformable to our suffering Saviour, and therefore have they loved it. And more than this, those who have been led by the wisdom of God have found, not only that the crosses of life are essentially connected with the way of salvation, but that by them and through them alone we are often positively driven to God. We may try to avoid them, and at times, perhaps, succeed;

we may flee from them or endeavor to still the voice of their pain; or, when unable to escape them, we may, in our wrath and desperation, rise up against them and rebuke them: but they persistently remain, they continue to haunt, as if to woo and to win us to penetrate their deeper meaning, and discover the treasure that in them lies concealed. The very breakdown of human things, the severing of human ties and relationships, the loss of health and wealth, of treasures and friends, and of all that life holds dear, are really meant, in the deepest sense, to drive us to the divine. This is the meaning of those tears and sorrows, those pains and sufferings, that loneliness, that grief, that agony of heart and soul which belong to this world of tears. All these are intended to teach us that here below, on this crumbling shore of time, we have no abiding city, or home, or life, or love; but seek a city, a home, a life, a love that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

We need God, we were made for God, and our nature, with all its longings and powers, cries out for Him. And therefore has God so arranged the world, in spite of all its evils, and in spite of all our sinfulness, that, if we do not prevent it, it will lead us out to happiness - lead us out to Himself. It was our sin that despoiled the face of the world; but God, in His mercy, has drawn good out of evil, He has made the effects of sin minister to our advantage, if we will but have it so. We may, forsooth, refuse, because we are free; we may object, and rebel, and oppose our lot; we may take our destiny out of the hands of our Creator and attempt to shape it for ourselves; we may deride and despise the humble, the lowly of heart, the patient, the mortified and the suffering; we may upbraid the Providence of God and its workings, and refuse to submit to the rule of the Creator; we may hold in derision and contempt the little band that is sweetly marching the way of the cross, preferring for ourselves the company of the multitude that knows not God - all this can we do, because we are free; but if such be our choice, and if we persevere in it, our portion is fixed, and we shall have at last only to say with the wicked: "Therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath

the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runneth on." (Wisdom 5:6-9)

Sufferings, therefore, are common to all, to the good and the bad, to the wise and the foolish, to the children of light and to the children of darkness. But only those who are directed by grace and light from above are able to pierce the deeper meaning of the cross. All have to bear it, but not all understand it; all feel the weight of it, but all do not know the power of it. Like fortune, it knocks at every door, into every heart it endeavors to enter and make known its deeper significance, its hidden secrets, lest any of us should suffer in vain, and our lives be altogether a failure. To be able to suffer patiently and gladly for God's sake, is thus a great wisdom; it is a sign of future blessedness. It is the wisdom of God, which is foolishness to men. "If thou hadst the science of all the astronomers," says Eternal Wisdom; "if thou couldst speak and discourse about God as fully and well as all angels and men; if thou alone were as learned as the whole body of doctors; all this would not bestow on thee so much holiness of life as if, in the afflictions that come upon thee, thou art able to be resigned to Me and to abandon thyself to Me. The former is common to good and bad, but the latter belongs to My elect alone."

We know that our Saviour took upon Himself the cross of sorrow and suffering, not alone that He might satisfy for our transgressions and be our ransom from bondage, but also that He might be unto us an example and a leader. And knowing that our unfaithfulness had incurred severest maladies from which none could escape, He bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows for us, in order that we, in our time, might bear our inevitable afflictions for His sake, for love of Him, and thereby attain to unending glory with Him. "For the spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs, indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him." (Romans 8:16,17) "If you partake of the sufferings of Christ," says Saint Peter, "rejoice that when his glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." (1 Peter 4:13) The chains of sorrow which bind us here below, our Shepherd thus would turn to golden cords of love, which draw and hold us to Himself. We cannot, as we see, ascend to Heaven, rise to blessedness, except by the way of the cross. And our degree

of glory in Heaven, the eternal happiness which we shall enjoy, will be in proportion to the degree of charity or love of God which our souls possess at death; and this divine charity, which is to measure our future beatitude, is acquired and augmented by faithfully doing the will of God - by patiently and lovingly bearing the cross of life. Sacrifice is the test of love. And hence the more we do and suffer for Christ's sake, the more we prove our love for Him and the greater shall be our happiness in the kingdom of His Father. All holy writers, all the masters of the spiritual life agree in teaching that God particularly chastises those whom He loves with a special love. He proves the elect to find if they are worthy of Himself. (Wisdom 3:4,6) He does not spare them now, that He may spare them hereafter; He tries them for a time, that He may reward them forever; He seems harsh with them here, during the time of probation, only that He may draw them closer to Himself everlastingly.

The devoted friends of God and the ardent lovers of things spiritual have deeply pondered these momentous truths. They have realized that our days here, though few and fast-flying, are really to determine our lot and condition throughout the eternal years. They have known that the passing present is the price of the lasting future; that this is the seeding time, and hereafter the harvest. And because our future happiness is to be in accord with our merits here acquired, jealously have they sought and embraced every present occasion to increase their merits and their worthiness for the glory that is to come. This is why they have loved the cross, the symbol of salvation, the emblem of victory; this, too, is why they have felt disturbed and full of fear when the cross was absent from them. Unlike the unenlightened sufferer, who sees only punishment in his pains, the saints of God have ever accepted their crosses as a sign of special love, a divine visitation, a preparation for the great communion.

We see now how it is that the rod of chastisement and the staff of mercy are able to give joy and comfort to God's chosen friends; and thus are they designed to console and comfort everyone who is truly led by faith and love. Sufferings are really a blessing, but the eye of faith alone discerns it. They keep us from present pleasures, from hurtful occasions, from alluring vanities; they direct us into the way of salvation, they drive us to God, they increase the glory of our eternal blessedness. What are the trials of earth

when compared with the joys of Heaven? Rather, how precious are they! since, if we use them aright, they lead us out into a higher life, to a closer friendship with God. And if, through the mercy of our heavenly Father, we permit the cross to lead us to His knees and enrich our lives with His love, who can speak its infinite value? What treasure can be likened to it? Surely nothing that we know can surpass it in worth. We might, indeed, enjoy all that life can give; we might possess all riches, all health, all success; we might have honor, fame, glory, power; the praise and love of men, the treasures of earthly friendship and earthly affection - the whole world we might gain and enjoy; but if through all these, or in spite of all, we should not be led to the love and friendship of God, we should know only vanity, and life for us would in its issue be nothing but a dismal failure.

But if, on the contrary, through the sufferings and losses, the deficiencies and limitations of life, we have been led to make God our dearest friend, if we have been taught, by the coldness and harshness of men, to take refuge in His love, how blessed are we! how cheaply the purchase has been made, even though it has meant the loss of every passing good, of all that the world can give, even the pouring out of our own life's blood!

Teach me, O my Master, in the day of sorrow and tribulation, to understand the meaning of the cross, to know the value of my sufferings, to grasp the power and the secret of Thy rod and Thy staff. Assist me to see Thee through the darkness that surrounds me; and give me to feel, in the midst of loneliness and perils, amid pain and desolation, the nearness to my soul of Thy loving-kindness, and the strength of Thy merciful presence.

## **Thou Spreadest Before Me a Table in the Presence of Mine Enemies**

In the preceding verses of the Shepherd Psalm the Psalmist has described the constant care of the shepherd for his sheep - the rest and refreshment, the protection and comfort he provides for them. And now, in the present verse, he speaks of a feast he has prepared for them, which is to be likened to a bountiful banquet - a banquet which they are to enjoy, a feast which they are to consume, in the sight of their enemies, in the presence of the evils that afflict them. He refers, at first, to the manner of preparing or spreading a table in the Orient. Often the custom of olden times was not much different from that which prevails among the Arabs even today. To prepare a table means with them simply to spread a skin or a cloth or a mat on the ground.

And it is to this kind of table that the Psalmist refers when he sings of the feast of the sheep. He means nothing more than that he has provided for his flock in the face of their enemies a rich pasture, a spreading slope, where they shall feed with contentment and peace, in spite of the evils that surround them.

But the quiet and peace which the sheep enjoy, while partaking of their spread-out banquet, are entirely owing to the protecting presence of the shepherd. And it frequently happens that here again the utmost skill and diligence of the shepherd are called into play in thus securing the peace and safety of his flock. The most abundant pastures are many times interspersed with noxious weeds and plants, which, if eaten, would sicken and poison the herd; while around the feeding places and grazing grounds very often lie hid, in thickets and holes and caves in the hillsides, wild animals, such as jackals, wolves and panthers, ready to spring out, at the critical moment, and devour the innocent sheep. The shepherd is aware of all these evils and enemies of his tender flock; and he goes ahead and prepares the way, avoiding the poisonous grasses, and driving away, or slaying, if need be, the beasts that menace the peace and security of the pasture. The evils are not

entirely dispelled, but only sufficiently removed or held in check so as not to imperil the flock.

Such is the table prepared for the sheep by their provident and watchful shepherd; and such is the feast of which they partake with quiet joy in the sight and presence of their enemies. But, as just said, the tranquil joy which is theirs comes not from the fact that danger has been all removed, nor from the fact that they have become hardened and used to its presence. They know it is always near; and they are conscious, as far as animals can be, of their own utter helplessness, if left to themselves, to survive an attack of their powerful enemies. But they do not fear, they are not disturbed or anxious, solely for the reason that they feel their shepherd is present, and they know he will guard and protect them. Hence the Psalmist is speaking for the sheep when he says to the shepherd with a tone of confident joy, "Thou spreadest before me a table in the presence of mine enemies."

The spiritual meaning of this, like the other verses of the Shepherd Psalm, is peculiarly descriptive of our Lord, the Good Shepherd of human souls. He, in a manner altogether divine, precedes His elect, and prepares them the way of salvation. He does not deliver them from enemies and dangers, which would be unnatural in the present state, but He makes use of evils, as said before, to increase the perfection of His chosen souls. Gradually, step by step, from a natural He leads them to a higher state - from diffidence to trust, from fear to love, from sorrow and anguish to peace and joy.

The change in the soul is rarely at once and immediate; it does not come of a sudden. At first it is difficult and repugnant to nature to find joy in sorrow and pleasure in pain, to see gladness in tears and rest in disturbance, to find peace in the midst of our enemies; but God, in His omnipotent goodness, so disposes and provides for the souls of His elect that sooner or later they penetrate to the meaning of things, and find there their hidden treasure. When the fabric of life itself has crumbled to its native dust, when friends have gone and charms departed, when the very earth we tread seems trembling beneath our feet, and every dream of earthly bliss is fled, when enemies sit where loved ones sat, and the heart has all but ceased to beat, then is the acceptable time and propitious moment, for the devout and faithful soul, that has washed its garments in the blood of the Lamb, to look



up to Heaven with expectant joy. The thrilling vision of eternal love so much desired, so long perhaps delayed, is then, indeed, about to dawn.

The sweetness of God and the peace of His spirit are not to be found in the market place, nor in the noise and clamor of the busy street. It is not at the banquets of earthly kings that we taste of the joys of the Saviour's feast. It is not amid honors and riches and the pleasures of sense that the calm dews of Heaven refresh the soul. We were made for a higher friendship, for a more intimate union, for a sweeter companionship than any that earth can provide. And it is only when the door has been shut to the outer world, when the vanities of time have ceased to be sought, that the soul is ready for the wedding garment, and able to prepare for the marriage feast. It is in the inner sanctuary and alone, divested of fleshy trammels and freed from the bondage of earthly attachments, that the soul is able to meet its God and hold intimate converse with Him.

There are few, comparatively, out of the multitude of souls that are called to the feast which is spread for them, that ever sit down at the Master's table. Many are invited, and the servant is sent out at the hour of supper to say to them that were called, that all things are ready, and that they should come; but they tarry, they are not ready, they begin to make excuses and wish to be held excused. Some are entangled in perishable riches and cannot leave their possessions; others are preoccupied with worldly affairs and must not neglect their business; still others are pursuing the pleasures of earth, and have no time for the things of Heaven. But the feast is not for these, after all. The Master invites them, He calls them, He sends His ministers in search of them, He reproves and chides them, He thunders against them to make them hear and obey; but they will not come, they shall never taste of His banquet. He has not spread a table for the proud, the haughty, the arrogant; He cannot meet in loving communion the worldly, the sensuous, the lovers of ease and hurtful pleasures. Such as these are not prepared to meet Him; they would be out of place and ill at ease in His company, they do not like His society. (Luke 14)

To be able to come to the Master and to sit at His feast there is need of preparation. The garments of the world must be changed for the garments of Heaven, the ways of men must be made to yield to the ways of God. For

what is wisdom with men is foolishness with God, (1 Corinthians 1:25) the weak things of earth are the strong things of Heaven, the outcast of the world are the chosen of the Father Almighty. And hence our Saviour under the figure of the master in the parable who prepared a great supper, says of all those who will not hear Him, who neglect His divine inspirations and despise the call of His ministers, that they shall never taste of His feast. But who, then, shall sit down at His table? for whom has He prepared the banquet? He tells us Himself, that those who shall partake of His supper are the lowly, the humble, the poor, the lame, and the blind; the despised of men and the outcast of the people; those who have known sorrow and suffering and penance, who have found the way of the cross and embraced it; who, for the kingdom of Heaven and the love of Christ crucified, have given up father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters; yea, and their own life also, that they might inherit everlasting crowns that fade not away. (Luke 14:26)

Saint Paul was one of these masterful spirits, who surrendered all that he had, all that he prized most dearly for love of Christ and His service. "The things that were gain to me," he says, "the same have I counted loss for Christ. Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as waste, that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:7,8) What a struggle, too, was that which Saint Augustine describes, speaking of his own conversion! The parting with those sinful delights which had hitherto held him in chains was like the forfeiture of all he possessed, and it seemed to him that life thereafter would not be worth living; yet he generously and vigorously gave them up that Christ might become his possession. He has also described for us the change. "How sweet," he says, "did it at once become to me to want the sweetness of those trifles, which to lose had been my fear, but which to have lost was now a joy! Thou didst cast them forth from me, oh Thou true and highest sweetness! Thou didst cast them forth, and in their stead didst enter in Thyself, sweeter than all pleasure!" (Confess. ix. 1.)

It is such as these, heroic souls, who for the sake of God and His kingdom, have made the world their enemy, that compose the company of the elect. And for these alone it is that the Shepherd of souls has spread a table of rest

and peace, even in this life, of which they partake in the sight of their enemies, in the presence of those who think evil of them, who despise and deride them, in the sight of the world which hates them. These holy souls, the elect of God, whom the Father has chosen for Himself, have learned, through the trials and losses of life, the lessons of peace and detachment which crosses are intended to teach. They have learned, by exclusion and retirement from worldly festivities and pernicious delights, to draw near to God, out of love for His beauty and mercy, or if only to ease their breaking hearts and dispel the loneliness of their forsaken lives. In the words of the Psalmist, they have tasted and seen that the Lord is sweet, and that there is no one like unto God. (Psalm 33:9; 82:2) With the image of the Crucified before their eyes and conscious of the presence of their loving Shepherd, they greet with delight the sufferings that oppress them, and they feast in peace in the presence of their enemies. They know that all is arranged or permitted by the hand that guards them, and by the One that loves them; and, though He slay them, yet will they trust Him. (Job 13:15) For what can happen to those that love God? what evil can befall them? Angels have charge over them to keep them in all their ways. (Psalm 90:11)

It is confidence, therefore, in their Saviour and God that gives peace and tranquillity to the souls of the just. To know Him, to love Him, to trust Him, to dwell in His presence and to please Him, throughout all the vicissitudes and evils of life, are the objects of their constant actions and the highest aspirations of their fervid souls. Confident of the favor and protection of God, and rooted in His love, they despise all pain and the threats of men; and in the midst of the battle of life they rejoice in a peace of mind and soul of which the worldling cannot dream. The pasture in which they feed, the banquet of which they partake are nothing else than the love and friendship of God which nourishes and refreshes their spirits when to every mortal eye they seem destitute, abandoned and alone. And this peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, (Philippians 4:7) develops in souls truly spiritual a habit of mind and a character of life that even here below partake of the stability and calm sense of victory which, in their perfection, belong only to the state of the blessed in Heaven. They feel that all things are possible to them through Him that strengtheneth them, (Philippians 4:13) and that no temporal affliction, no power of man or any creature shall wrest from them the feast which they enjoy. And hence they are able to ask, in the

confident words of the Apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness; or danger, or persecution, or the sword ... In all these things we overcome, because of him that hath loved us. Therefore we are sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."  
(Romans 8:33-39)

## **Thou Anointest My Head With Oil; My Cup Runneth Over**

In these words the Psalmist alludes to one of the most touching offices performed by the good shepherd towards his sheep. The day is drawing to a close, the golden orb of light has sunk to rest, and the shadows are creeping up the hills. The hush of night is falling round, and the shepherd must gather his flock into the fold. The labors, the journeys, the trials, the wanderings of the day are over, and now comes the time for rest. It is a scene full of peace, and the sheep greet its approach with feelings of restful anticipation. Many of them are foot-sore and lame; many have received bruises and scratches during the journeyings of the day; some have gaping and bleeding wounds from the attacks of wild beasts; while others are simply tired out and exhausted from the long walks and steep climbing of hills. The shepherd knows all this, and before leading them into rest he takes care to see that the wounds of all are dressed and soothed, so that nothing shall disturb the sweet repose of their sleep. For this purpose he stands at the door of the fold as the sheep pass in. He has olive oil and cedar-tar to use as healing ointments for their wounds, and he has cool, refreshing water for those that are worn and weary. Lovingly and tenderly he regards each member, as one by one they enter into rest; and they that are wounded or over-weary he holds back with his rod, till their scars and sores are duly cared for and made ready for the night's repose.

How closely these offices performed for the sheep by the shepherd resemble the care of our Father and Saviour providing at the end for the souls that He loves! He has been with them all through life, leading, guiding, guarding, shepherding them at all times, going before them with the blessings of goodness. And when at length the end approaches, they feel the need of His loving-kindness perhaps more than ever before. Like the shepherd's flock, their needs are many and various. Some souls there are who, through the special grace of God, are able to pass their lives in innocence and holiness, living in the world, yet not of it, dwelling in the midst of men and in the sight of their wickedness and sin, yet undefiled

withal, beautiful witnesses of the power and love of Him that strengthens and preserves them.

But the majority are not thus favored. Notwithstanding all their graces, they have been subject to falls - perhaps to many grievous falls; they have suffered many wounds and bruises, they have had many tears to shed. Multitudes there are, in fact, who come down to the verge of life, to the very gate of death, sin-stained, racked and wounded, their life blood ebbing out through sores and wounds which they themselves have made by wilful open friendship with sin and vice, the deadly foes of their souls. We have many varying examples of these straying souls. There is the type of Mary Magdalen, of Saint Peter, of Saint Paul, of Saint Augustine, who passed a portion, brief or prolonged, of their mortal days far from the Father's home, feeding on the husks of swine; but who, while yet in the vigor of life, felt the touch of the merciful hand and heard the sound of the loving voice, leading them, calling them back to God, back to the "beauty ever ancient and ever new." Such souls as these, it is true, constitute one class of erring, but repenting sinners; but there is another class whose plight is far more pitiable. They are those long-delayed, but finally repentant sinners, men and women who have lived their lives away from the Church and its sacraments, who have grown old and gray in the sins of their youth, and now, at the last, when death is coming, are moved, by a special grace from Heaven, to weep for their sins and wasted years before they enter their eternal abode.

For each and all of these how important it is that the Shepherd should stand at the door of the fold and bind up their wounds with His tender grace before they pass through the portals of death! Scarred and wayward children, victims of evil circumstances, creatures of vanity and of folly, they realize at the end how impotent they are, how helpless in the presence of the coldness of death to redeem or make sure the years that are fled, unless He draw near and assist them who has sustained them in life, and who is at once the author and the master of both life and death!

But for all, without exception, the need of the Shepherd is imperative at the end. The victory, the happy issue of life's struggle, "is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." (Romans

9:16) All may run, all may strive, indeed, for the prize of eternal life, but none can be sure, short of the mercy of God, that he will be saved; none can merit this crowning glory of life. Whether young or old, whether favored or neglected, whether innocent or guilty, whether the life has been dowered with special blessings and never known the stain of grievous sin, or whether it has been eked out amidst deepest misery and defiled with hateful crimes, the same uncertainty for all remains as to the manner in which the end shall come. Men may reason and conjecture, from what they see and know, that this one or that is in God's favor, and shall so persevere to the end; that the members of a certain family, or class, or station in life, are sure to be saved, and shall never fall short; but that those of another class or condition shall, on the contrary, die as they have lived, in the filth of their sins, to be forever in torment. But these are the reasonings of men, which are of no avail in the sight of God. It is only the Father in Heaven who knows the elect. He alone is able to tell who shall remain to be crowned, and who is to be condemned. Perseverance is a gratuitous gift of God, we cannot merit it. All our good actions and holy deeds, which are performed in the state of grace and out of a motive of charity, do, it is true, merit a reward in Heaven, they tend to increase our blessedness hereafter; but just as it is not in our power to merit the first grace, by which we are raised from a state of sin, so are we utterly unable to do anything which shall secure for a certainty the final grace, by which alone we can be saved. Wherefore the Preacher said: "All these things have I considered in my heart, that I might carefully understand them: there are just men and wise men, and their works are in the hand of God; and yet man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred. But all things are kept uncertain for the time to come, because all things equally happen to the just and to the wicked, to the good and to the evil, to the clean and to the unclean, to him that offereth victims, and to him that despiseth sacrifices. As the good is, so also is the sinner; as the perjured, so he also that sweareth truth." (Ecclesiastes 9:1,2)

This uncertainty as to the end of life, and of the gift of final perseverance, all holy souls have felt. To die in the friendship of God, and thence to enjoy His presence forever, is a gift of so transcendent a nature, so far above our natural powers and utmost deserts that no creature, which can at all conceive it, would dare claim it as a right. It was this conviction that made the saints tremble to think of it. This it was that prompted Saint Paul to

admonish the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, (Philippians 2:12) and that also evoked from the same Apostle those candid words concerning himself: "I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection; lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway." (1 Corinthians 9:27)

And have we not sometimes witnessed instances which, so far as man can judge, give ground for this fear as to perseverance, and emphasize the great truth that to die in God's favor is, indeed, a singular and a gratuitous gift? How many have we not known who started well, but terminated ill! How many are innocent and holy in youth and give every promise of splendid manhood, but fade and drop, like poisoned flowers, ere the age of maturity has dawned! How many are able to pass through the most critical period of their lives, unshaken and undefiled, full of faith, hope, love, purity; but who, when the age of security is thought to have come, lose the grip which seemed so firm, turn to evil, yield to vicious habits, and die reprobates of God! Look at King Solomon! Who was ever more promising than he in his youth? Who ever gave fairer prospects of continued holiness and of a beautiful end? He was so lovely, so amiable, so favored of God in the morning of life; graced with such high perfections, not knowing evil, a stranger to vice, a lover of sanctity, of wisdom, and of grace. It would seem that he could never fall - he who was the object of such unwonted favors, who dwelt so supremely in the smile of Heaven. But lo, and behold the end of him who had received so many graces, who chose wisdom as his handmaid that he might be guided aright! Behold that youthful figure, so full of promise and goodly hope, praying to God that he might never deviate from the ways of grace; and then see the gray-haired apostate tottering to the grave, borne down by the weight of his sins and of his years! And how many more there have been, like King Saul, like Renan and Voltaire, and numerous others that we ourselves perhaps have known, who were great and good in youth, and for a term of years, but whose end was a miserable failure!

Our perseverance, then, or the favor to die in the state of grace, is not of ourselves, not the reward of our efforts, or of our good works, "but of God that sheweth mercy." We must do all in our power to merit eternal life; we must press on to the mark, waging ceaseless battle in behalf of God and of



our souls, even to the last moment; but for the happy end of it all we must perforce rely on the tender mercy of God. This is why our Lord, before He departed from earth, prayed to His heavenly Father for His disciples: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name whom Thou hast given me; ... I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world; but that thou shouldst keep them from evil." (John 17:11-15) This same truth the Psalmist also had in mind when he prayed: "Perfect thou my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps be not moved." (Psalm 16:5)

It is this appalling uncertainty about the end and outcome of life, together with our own inability to make them secure, that makes death so terrible to the minds and thoughts of multitudes, even of Christians and well-living persons. They fear to fall into the hands of the living God. For them the present life may be not so attractive; on the contrary, it is likely replete with pain and toil; but somehow they wish to linger here, preferring that which is certain, although so miserable, to that which is doubtful, perhaps awful and irreparable. So long as they continue in this present world there is chance for change, there is hope of improvement. But when death intervenes, and the soul is removed to the other life, all hopes of change are swept away, and the lot of the soul is fixed for eternity. There is, of course, a fear of death which is altogether natural. Many dread death who pretend not to believe in a future life, or even in the existence of God. And many there are whose lives are holy, and who have not whereof they ought to fear, but for whom, nevertheless, the very thought of death is fraught with all manner of terrors. As some are naturally afraid in the absence of light, and tremble with fear at being alone in a dark and lonely dwelling, or spot, or place, so there are many who, without assignable reason, other than a native tendency, are appalled at the thought of death.

But when all due allowances have been made for the uncertainty of final perseverance, and for the anxiety arising from natural temperament, it seems not too much to say that, for the most part, the fear and dread of death which haunts so many Christians can be reduced to two causes: a defect of faith or a love of the world. It is one of these causes, or both of them together, which alone can explain, in the majority of cases, why such numbers of Christians and Catholics are unwilling to surrender the present life, and are disturbed at the very thought of dying. Either they do not

realize by faith the surpassing glories of the life beyond - doubting its reality, questioning its nature, misunderstanding the goodness and mercy of God; or else they are so attached to the present existence that all serious thought and desire for a better life are excluded from their minds and hearts. Fenelon says that the condition of our spiritual life is indicated by the answers we give to the following questions: "Do I love to think of God? Am I willing to suffer for God? Does my desire to be with Him destroy my fear of death?" We do not fear to meet or to be with one whom we really love, for "love casteth out fear." There is no dread at the coming of the parent or friend whom we truly love, unless, perchance, we have offended him, and lack full faith that we have been forgiven and reinstated in his favor and friendship.

So it is with God. If we are unwilling to meet Him, or filled with fear at the approach of His coming, it seems of a certainty that our faith is at fault. Why should we not wish to meet Him who has made us, who loves us, who has washed away our sins with His own blood, who alone can comfort our trembling souls and fill us with every good? Perhaps we have sinned and betrayed our Maker many times and grievously in our lives, and the voices of those sins are haunting us, and bidding us beware of the hour of death and of the judgment that follows. Perhaps there is a lurking suspicion that we have not been forgiven, a temptation that we are not sincere, a feeling that our sins are too grave to be pardoned, a conviction that we do not belong to the company of the elect. We may have notions, moreover, altogether severe, of the nature of God and of His justice; we feel His immensity and sanctity, we have heard so much of His ineffable beauty, that, weighed down with a sense of our nothingness, of our poverty and misery and sinfulness, we cannot but shudder at the thought of appearing in His presence. These and similar terrors may take hold of us and fill us with a dread of death; but is it not clear that, whatever their cause, these fears are born of a lack of faith? We do not trust, as we ought, the Shepherd that loves us, we are not convinced of His mercy and kindness, if we do not believe with child-like confidence that He stands ready ever to forgive and bless the least of His children that humbly and sincerely seek Him, asking for the help they need. The severity of God toward sinners endures only so long as they refuse to acknowledge their guilt. His harshness with them, like that of Joseph with his brethren, is but love in disguise; and as soon as

they are brought to own their guilt, that which before was the anger of God is swiftly turned into His love and mercy. Christ did not come to destroy, but to save. He will not crush the broken reed, nor extinguish the smoking flax. (Isaiah 42:3) "As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." (Psalm 102:13,14)

But there is also the love of the world, which enslaves so many. So numerous and so bewitching are the attractions of the present life that they are loath to leave them. It is a beautiful world, this universe of ours, so deep, so wide, so vast! It is filled with pleasures and allurements and graced with myriad charms; and he, indeed, seems cold of heart who can easily turn from its enchanting beauties, and close his ear to its manifold voices. Ponder for a moment the richness of nature, its similarity and variety, its sameness and its diversity; consider the abundance of the harvest - the glowing fruits, the green and golden crops, the sweet-scented flowers and gift-bearing grasses; see the stars above and the waters beneath - all the wonders of earth and sky; and then when you have ranged over fields and waves and mountains, when you have climbed up the steepes of the sky and gazed on the marvels of the heavens, descend again to earth and consider the human form - the chiefest work of the Almighty hand, and the crown of the natural world. What beauties are here concealed! What a mingling of material and spiritual, of human and almost divine! What words can express, what lines portray the beauty of the human countenance? Who can describe or adequately define the loveliness that streams from human eyes, or echoes from the human voice? And yet these are but the outer fringes and dimmest glimpses of the beauties of the soul that dwells within.

How painful, then, it is for the worldly to forsake the beauties and pleasures of this present life. Bound down to their beds of clay by the things of sense, they are grieved to part with a life so full of diverse attractions. How can they think undismayed of closing forever their eyes and ears to these charms of color and sound! It is such a difficult thing, and so hard to nature, to abandon these scenes of enticing pleasure, to bid farewell to those that are dear and be hurried away alone and forlorn to the chill and gloom of the grave.

So reason the children of the world; but are not their reasonings and feelings a proof of their little faith, and of their poor conceptions of spiritual and eternal interests? They do not want to leave the world, because they love it; and they love the world, because their faith is too weak to raise them to a vision of higher things. The plain on which they stand is too low clearly to see the things of Heaven. How poor and trifling at best is the earth and all it contains to Him who beholds with a vivid faith the world above that is to come! How gladly does he lay down his life and give up the struggle with ceaseless battles, who sees by faith, just beyond the portals of death, the great home of the blessed, spread out like a city on the mountains, bathed in light inaccessible, full of joy and unending gladness, where "death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more." (Apocalypse 21, 4)

The man of faith, therefore, is in no wise straightened or disturbed by the approach of death. He has learned to know and to trust the good Master whom he serves. Like the Apostle, he is only concerned that Christ should be glorified in him at all times and in all things, "whether it be by life or by death;" for to him also, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:20,21) He lives in the world, but is not of it; he treads the ways of earth, but he really belongs to the kingdom above. Hence his cup of interior peace is ever running over. Though surrounded by many evils, he does not faint; though tempted exceedingly, he does not yield; but is joyous and peaceful withal; because at all times and in all things he feels himself to be the faithful servant of God, "in much patience, in tribulation, in necessities, in distresses, in strifes, in prisons, in seditions, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, in chastity, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Ghost, in charity unfeigned; ... as dying, and yet living; as chastised, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as needy, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." (2 Corinthians 6:4-11)

"Precious in the sight of God is the death of His Saints." As they have lived for Christ, they gladly welcome the summons that calls them home to rest. Calmly and fearlessly they go down to death; joyously and with feelings of exultation they hail the coming of Him on whom their thoughts have rested throughout life, of Him whom they have ever seen by faith, whom they have loved, whom they have trusted, whom they have chosen for their own.

Confident of the power and goodness of their faithful Shepherd, pain daunts them not, the enemy frets them not. The last hour for them is not one of darkness, but of light; it is not a time for lamentations, but for joyous and gladsome strains. The end may be sudden, or it may be gradual in its approach; it may come early, or late in life; it may be at home or abroad; it may be in the winter, or it may be in summer; on the sea or on the land; but to the just and spiritual it can never be a surprise, it can never be lonely, never sad. It is the time for which they have always longed - a time of liberation, of emancipation from the trammels of earth and flesh, the end of continuous dying and the beginning of lasting life. What a supreme moment, what a joyous event is death for a just and holy soul! What sweet emotions must thrill the spirit, as the Saviour stoops over the bed of death to wipe away forever the last of earthly tears! Mary is there to hush the voice of reproach and to whisper words of peace; Jesus has come to claim the soul and take it to Himself, and flights of angels are waiting to sing it to its rest.

## **Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me All the Days of My Life; and I Shall Dwell in the House of the Lord Unto Length of Days**

If the tender lambs and timid sheep of the shepherd's flock could speak the sentiments of their innocent hearts, each one would certainly voice the words which here the Psalmist has uttered for them all. Throughout the live-long day, throughout all the days of their lives, they experience the shepherd's goodness, they are the objects of his constant mercy. He has been caring for them since their birth; he has led them out each morning, since first they were able to walk; he has provided them with food, and led them to water; and he has ever been present to shield them from harm, and to protect them from their enemies. After such repeated experiences and trials of his loving-kindness, they have grown accustomed to his faithfulness and are filled with love of his goodness and mercy. And while they have not the power of speech, and cannot by words express their feelings, they do by the louder voice of action - by their quiet trust in his care, by their habitual mildness and gentleness and quick response to his every word, by the absence of solicitude and fear in view of his presence - by these and all the other actions that speak their simple hearts they show their love for their shepherd. Though often wounded and bleeding and exhausted from the roughness and length of their journeys, they have no distrust about the future, no fear for the morrow. In the midst of distress the shepherd, they know, will provide. The Psalmist, therefore, in the closing words of the shepherd song, gives utterance to the feelings of the sheep when he sings: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord unto length of days."

But here, as in the opening verse of the Shepherd Psalm, the words of the sacred Singer, although truly expressive of the sentiments of the sheep, are more directly the expression of his own inner feelings, and of the feelings of all faithful souls towards the Lord who rules and guides them. All those whose lives have been really and sincerely led by faith, have, like the shepherd's flock, grown trustfully accustomed, in the course of years, to the goodness and mercy, to the faithfulness and love of the hand that provides

for them. As they look into their lives, and retrace the steps they have taken, they cannot fail to see how God has been always with them, patiently enduring their faults, mercifully binding up their wounds and hurts, and lovingly leading, drawing them to Himself. They can see their advancement, slow perhaps as it has been; and they know it is God who has given the increase. Looking now at their lives through the perspective of the years that are gone, how many problems they are able to solve! for how many apparent mysteries they have found an explanation! All those crosses and trials, all those struggles and battles with the enemy, all those attacks from within and assaults from without, all, in fact, that they have ever endured, their sins alone excepted, they now can trace, through the light of faith, back to the hand of their Father in Heaven. Not everything, forsooth, has yet been explained, but enough, indeed, is sufficiently clear to remove every doubt from the faithful soul as to the goodness and Providence of God. And hence she exclaims with the Psalmist, out of the abundance of her faith and confidence, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

It is doubtless a lack of implicit trust in God and divine Providence which, more than anything else, accounts for the unhappiness and spiritual barrenness of so many Christian and religious lives. Poor and scanty is the fruit they yield, simply because they have no depth of soil, they are not deeply and firmly rooted in faith and confidence in God. Like reeds shaken by the wind, like houses built on the sand, they tremble and shake with every blast, they are all but overturned by every tempest that rises.

Nor is it wonderful that this should be so. The higher gifts of the spirit come from God, and hence the good fruit which the spirit yields is also traceable back to Him. "We do not gather grapes from thorns nor figs from thistles; and as a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, so neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit." (Matthew 7:16-19) And just because the abundance of the harvest of the spiritual life is dependent upon God as its giver, is it strange that any distrust of Him and His Providence should be a great hindrance to the soul's advancement, and to the bestowal of the constant help it needs? Can God be pleased with those who do not confide in Him, and who do not trust Him? Our Lord's own chiding words to His disciples are a proof of His displeasure at any distrust in His power and goodness.

How often did He rebuke them for their want of confidence in Him! How often did He accuse them reproachfully of their "little faith," (Matthew 6:30) of being "slow of heart," (Luke 24:25) of being an "unbelieving and perverse generation!" (Matthew 17:16) He was constantly pointing to their lack of faith, reminding them that it was the source of their weakness, the cause of their ignorance in things spiritual, the reason of their powerlessness in the face of difficulties and against the enemies of their souls. It is clear that Almighty God, being a generous and loving Father, must be offended at those of His children who do not trust Him; and their want of faith in Him is consequently the reason for His denying to them the help which is the life of their souls, and without which they are powerless to be useful servants in His vineyard.

And this failure to confide in the goodness of God betrays itself in other ways. Besides sealing up the fountains of special graces and closing the door on divine generosity, besides a general unfruitfulness in the spiritual life, and the lack of all greater works for God and for souls, which are its immediate consequences, it also penetrates into the interior sanctuary of the spirit, and weakens at their source the springs of spiritual action. The results are manifest. Not only is there no yielding of fruit, but growth is likewise wanting. And if, under fairer conditions, there has ever been any progress, it is soon perceived to wither and wane in a soul devoid of living faith. All the exercises and practices of the Christian life participate in the baneful effects. Prayer and the use of the sacraments are either seriously neglected or gradually given up, and the blighting influences of irreligion rapidly spread and overrun all the departments of life. The view one takes of God, the faith or lack of faith and trust one has in Providence, have their effect on the character and give a direction to all one's ways of thinking, feeling, acting, in regard to the world we live in, in regard to mankind in general, in regard to the causes, purposes, and destinies of all things.

Our conceptions of Providence are vital, therefore. They really determine what our life is to be, and they are an index to the life that is finished. It is impossible that we should be quite the same whether we try to eliminate God from our lives, or allow His blessed influence to cheer and lead us on; whether we look upon Him as a cold Master, waiting to exact and to punish, or as a kind Father and Shepherd, seeking to spare and to save; whether we



regard Him as hid far in the heavens, caring naught for the creatures and the world He has made, or whether we conceive Him as intimately bound up with all the works of His hands, although distinct from them, as guiding and regulating everything, as tenderly loving and providing for all the needs of our souls.

Another most harmful result of deficient faith and confidence in God is that it leads us to trust in creatures. It causes us to reverse the proper order of things. We are dependent beings, and we instinctively feel our deficiencies and the need of some one, or something on which to lean, at times, and to which we can look for assistance. We may not be entirely and always conscious of this tendency in us, we may be too proud or too blind to admit it, or we may wish we could overcome it and rid our lives of so constant a need; but whether we see it and acknowledge it or not, whether we encourage it or try to repress it, the need is always there, deeply engraved in our nature as creatures, and we cannot but seek to satisfy it. There is none of us, frail beings that we are, who is entirely sufficient unto himself. Sometimes, of course, the voice of our needs is silent, and we feel that we shall never want; "I said in my abundance," observes the Psalmist, "I shall not be moved forever;" (Psalm 29:7) but when the tide begins to ebb and prosperity subsides, how soon do we remember that we are dust! How frequently in times of trouble, in times of illness and poverty and suffering, when face to face with our foes, or when death steps in and slaughters, are we made aware of our insufficiency, and of our utter helplessness to live our lives alone and meet single-handed the burdens and misfortunes of earth! It takes but a little frost to nip the root of all our greatness, and then when our high-blown pride breaks under us we quickly realize how fragile and insecure are the personal foundations of our lives. Naturally and reasonably, therefore, did the pagan philosophers conclude that friendship and friends were necessary to man.

Profoundly aware of this fundamental need of help and support which is a result of our nature, we habitually stretch out our hands to others, not only during the years of infancy and childhood, but to a greater or less extent throughout the whole period of our earthly existence. At first, of course, it is to creatures that we necessarily look - to parents, relatives, guardians, teachers, and later on, to friends and acquaintances. Our needs in the

beginning and in early years, though many and imperative, are comparatively simple; they can be satisfied by those around us. But as we advance to maturity and take in more completely the meaning of our lives, and consider not so much the needs of the body as the demands of the soul, we find that the multiple requirements of infancy and youth, which were able to be supplied by those that were near, have given way to the fewer, but vast and unlimited, claims of age, which express the wants of the spirit. It is when we appeal to creatures for the complete and permanent satisfaction of these latter necessities of our being, that we seriously err, and open the way to disappointment and sorrow. Not that we are to have no cherished and chosen friends, or that we should despise the needs and gifts, the privileges and blessings of friendship, which in truth our nature requires; nor again that we are to regard with skeptical, disdainful eyes the world and human nature; but we must not deceive ourselves by trying to find in any created being that which it does not possess. We must not endeavor to get from any creature that perfect satisfaction which we need, and which the Creator alone can give. Neither must we seek to fill the unlimited capacity of our souls with those gifts only, poor and defective at best, which frail mortals like ourselves are able to supply. It is folly in the highest degree to expect from anyone less than God that which only God can afford.

The mistake, therefore, is made when creatures of any kind are allowed to take the place of God; when they are sought and reposed in as an end in themselves, and as sufficient satisfaction for the needs of the human spirit. Unwise, indeed, is this mode of action, and bitter are the sorrows of soul to which it inevitably leads! One man trusts in riches, another in glory, another in the esteem of men; one leans upon his friends and companions, another upon his relatives - all forgetful of the frail and unsubstantial nature of every earthly prop. Frequently they never awaken to the peril of their state until they find themselves face to face with their doom and the awful disillusionment. The crash may be delayed, but the day must come sooner or later for all of us, who have advanced but a little beyond maturity, when all the natural lights of life go out, when every human prop is removed, and we find ourselves out alone and in the dark, so far as depends on the world and creatures. How miserable then shall we be if we have put our trust in men! if we have tried to make creatures play the part in our lives which

only God can play! When we need them most they fail us, when we fain would find beneath their protection a shield against the fiery darts of life, behold they wither like the ivy of Jonas and leave us alone in our want! (Jonah 4) How vain, therefore, and groundless is that confidence which is put in men, and how wretched that poor man that hangs on princes' favors! "Thou trustest in money," says Saint Augustine, "thou holdest to vanity; thou trustest in honor, and in some eminence of human power, thou holdest to vanity; thou trustest in some principal friend, thou holdest to vanity. When thou trustest in all these things, either thou diest and leavest them here, or in thy lifetime they all perish, and thou failest in thy trust." (in Psalm 30, Exp. 2)

It is no despisal, then, of the needs and helps of earthly friends and of our fellow-creatures to say that we should not put entire trust in them for all the wants and demands of our being. They are good, they were made by God, they are oftentimes able to assist us - nay, we need them to a certain extent; but they are utterly unable to satisfy us completely, they cannot if they would, simply because of the extent of our wants. And even if creatures could give us a partial contentment, as at times they seem to do, we know that it cannot last, and in the midst of our joy and pleasure we are haunted by the thought that some day, soon at latest, it all must pass away. We are seeking for rest, for peace, for happiness, and that unending; we want something to steady our lives and satisfy the yearnings of our souls forever: but we must not look for these things in the world, for the world at best is passing away. There is no stability to human things; the cloud and the storm swiftly follow the sunshine; we have not here below a lasting habitation. Today we are sitting at the banquet of pleasure, tomorrow we are draining the cup of sorrow; today we receive the applause of men, tomorrow we may be the objects of their scorn; today we put forth the tender leaves of hope, tomorrow there comes a killing frost that ruins all our prospects.

Such, then, is the lot of man when considered in his relations to creatures and to the world. It is a lot full of uncertainty, of instability, of vicissitude; but this should not make us skeptical or cynical; it affords no justification for pessimism. It is a condition arising, on the one hand, from the very nature of limited beings, and on the other, from the vast potentialities of our souls, which, while they are limited in giving to others, cannot be appeased

except by the God who made them. There is a craving in the heart of man for something which the world cannot give. He clutches for the things that are passing, he toils, he labors, he struggles; he strives for money, for power, for place, for honor, not that any of these things are in themselves what he desires, but only because he conceives them as means and helps to the satisfaction, to the stillness of mind, and peace of heart, and rest of soul and body for which his nature longs. Peace and happiness and contentment of life are the objects of all our dreams, of our persistent efforts, of our ambitions and aims; but until we give up the hope of finding these things in the world, in our fellow-mortals, in anything short of God, we shall never know the blessedness for which we yearn. If we would ever attain to the state which we covet, we must learn the lesson, even though it be through tears and sorrow, that God alone, who made our souls with all their vast desires, is able to comfort us and steady our lives amid the storms and distresses of earth.

It is futile to trust in men, or "in the children of men, in whom there is no salvation." (Psalm 145:2,3) The peace and blessedness which we seek are "not as the world giveth;" (John 14:27) and unless we turn away from the world and cease to torture our lives with its vanities, our portion can never be other than heartaches, secret loathing, consuming thirst. "For many friends cannot profit," says Thomas a'Kempis, "nor strong helpers assist, nor prudent counsellors give a profitable answer, nor the books of the learned afford comfort, nor any precious substance deliver, nor any place, however retired and lovely, give shelter, unless thou thyself dost assist, help, strengthen, console, instruct, and guard us." (Bk. 3; ch. 59:3) Such has been the history of the race, and such is the experience of every individual in the race that has placed his hope and trust in anything created.

We are confronted, therefore, on the one side by the inherent weakness of our own nature and the constant needs that arise therefrom; and on the other side, we are assured by the history of the race, if not by our own experience, that so long as we strive to satisfy our wants by an appeal to anything but God we are doomed to disappointment and sorrow. It is unfortunate that most people must first be crushed by the world and creatures which they serve before they grasp the fundamental truth that creatures are not their God. Comparatively few of those who enjoy the world are ever brought to

realize the dignity and divine purpose of their souls until the world and its allurements, like a false pageant on a false stage, give way beneath them, and they fall helpless and alone. It is commonly only after repeated awful experiences, when worn out and exhausted by years of fruitless quest for peace and happiness and contentment, that men wake up to the simple fact that the treasures which they seek are not in the world, nor as the world giveth.

But it is one thing to turn away from the world disappointed, disgusted and betrayed; and it is quite another thing to turn to God and to recognize Him as our good Father and Shepherd, patiently waiting to receive us, ever able and ready to satisfy our wants. There are many people who find the world a disappointment and a deception, and who turn from it with loathing and hate, but who fail ever to lift their weary eyes to the proper object of their trust. Like the Israelites of old, they succeed at length in escaping from the hands of oppression and tyranny, but only to wander in a desert land throughout the length of their days. This is the region where dwell the pessimist, the skeptic and the cynic - miserable mortals that have wasted on creatures the talents they should have given to their Creator, or that have otherwise failed in their conception of life, and have left unmultiplied the money of the Master. (Matthew 25:24-31) There is plainly no middle course for us, if we would not encounter disaster; we are not negative as to the necessities of our nature; it is not enough for us to turn from positive harm, from the objects that deceive and disappoint us; we must further turn to positive good, and to Him who alone can quiet and appease our yearning spirits.

One of the most evident and convincing reasons, then, why we should put our trust in God above all else is that He alone can satisfy and give us rest. Only God is able adequately to respond to all the needs of our being. The simplest process of reasoning should assure us of this, when once we perceive the vastness of our wants and the impossibility of their satisfaction through the medium of created things. We know our nature, which has come from the source and essence of truth, cannot be false. Neither can our unlimited capacities for knowledge, for joy, for happiness be a deceiving mockery. There is a way to peace for us, and a source of supreme contentment; there is a fountain of living waters from which, if we drink,

we shall never thirst again. Hence our Saviour said: "Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you;" (Matthew 11:28) and again, "he that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst forever: but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting." (John 4:13,14)

But we shall never be able to come to God, we shall never succeed even in getting near the secret of interior peace and contentment until we are able to grasp more or less comprehensively the great basic truths of our existence: that God loves each one of us with the love of an infinite Father, and that His Providence is so universal and omnipotent as to extend to all things, even to the numbering of the hairs of our head. We talk much about chance and fortune and accident, we speak every day of things happening, as if by the sheerest contingency, without warning or previous knowledge; and so it is with reference to ourselves, and to all the world perhaps: but with reference to divine Providence it is not so; there is nothing accidental, nothing unforeseen with respect to God. "Without Thy counsel and Providence, and without cause, nothing cometh to pass in the earth," (Book 3, chapter 1, 4) says the *Imitation*. But what does this mean, "God provides?" It means that the will of the omnipotent Father directs and governs everything. "Providence," says Saint John Damascene, "is the will of God, by which all things are fitly and harmoniously governed," (De Fide orthod. ii. 29) and such is its power that nothing can elude or deceive it, neither can it be hindered or baffled in any way. "For God will not except any man's person, neither will He stand in awe of any man's greatness; for He made the little and the great, and He hath equally care of all." (Wisdom 6:8)

And just as divine Providence disposes and governs all the events of life, directing each to its proper end, so the divine Will is the cause of everything that exists. Just as it is impossible that anything should escape God's knowledge and directing hand, so is it impossible that anything should exist or come into being without the direct intervention or permission of His will. There is nothing in the world which God has not made, and nothing takes place which is not according to His good-pleasure, except the malice and guilt of sin. Even all the other evils of life, such as sickness, suffering, disease, poverty, cold, hunger, thirst, and the like, God actually and

positively wills. And precisely because these things proceed from His will, they cannot be bad. God is the author of all good, and evil He cannot do. So good, indeed, is He that, if He were not sufficiently omnipotent to draw good out of evil, He would never have permitted any evil to exist. "God has judged it better," says Saint Augustine, "to work good out of evil, than to allow no evil." (Ench. tom. iii., ch. 27 and ii) We must not argue in our foolishness and try to understand all the doings of God, for His ways are not our ways, His thoughts not our thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8; Romans 11:33) It is often beyond our power even to understand our fellow-creatures, and how foolish it is to complain because we cannot comprehend the great Creator! Enough for us, if we be sincere and right of heart, to know, as we do, that God is good, that He loves us individually, and that His protecting hand guides and governs all the events of our lives, even to the smallest detail. These are truths which we must take hold of and lay close to our hearts, else we shall go the way of error and issue in ultimate disaster.

And from these truths, so certain and unquestionable, it further follows that everything existing in the world, so far as it affects us, everything that falls to our lot, all that we encounter, all that we suffer, all that we do, aside from sin, has been purposely arranged by Almighty God for our greater spiritual good and eternal salvation. This must be so, since God is the universal cause of all things, and since He sincerely loves us and desires above all to save us. If it were otherwise, either He would not have omnipotent control of everything, or He could not be said really to desire our salvation. How sadly we misunderstand these great truths in our daily lives, when we murmur and complain at the evils that afflict us! How narrowly we conceive the all-powerful will of God, and the infinite abyss of His goodness which would lead us to eternal delights! We would like to escape all the evils of time, we love our lives, and we wish to save them from final wreck; but when failing to trust to the will of God we forget the words of Christ, that "he that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal." (John 12:25) We want to save our souls, and we are, perhaps, much disturbed about doing many and great things in the cause of God and of Heaven, unmindful the while of the Master's warning that, "not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew

7:21) It is doubtless our aim to draw ever nearer and nearer to our Saviour, and to deepen our relationship with Him; but do we remember that He said, "whosoever shall do the will of God, he is my brother, and my sister, and mother?" (Mark 3:35)

"Yes," you will say, "This is all true; I know it is so; my faith is at fault. If I only had that beautiful faith and trust in God which many have it would be easy for me, and I should be happy! Faith is a gift and favored are they that possess it." But, dear reader, can you not pray? Can you not ask from God that heavenly gift which will move mountains and translate them into the sea? (Mark 11:23) Can you not overcome your indolence and your repugnance, and patiently and persistently implore from on high that superior vision which pierces the clouds and sees in everything the hand of God? Surely you can say, with the devout author of the Imitation of Christ, "Behold, Oh beloved Father, I am in Thy hands, I bow myself under the rod of Thy correction. Strike my back and my neck too, that my crookedness may be conformed to Thy will." (Book 3, chapter 1.6) Here again, remember the words of your Saviour, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." (Matthew 11:12)

Perhaps the greatest trial to our faith in divine Providence is in bearing what we call the wrongs of life. That we should have any crosses to suffer at all; that there should be death and sickness and disease; that there should be poverty and misery, distress and worry, labor and sorrow; that there should exist any of these things, is to our infirmity, if we forget our sins and the sins of our race that have caused these evils, a trial and a test of fidelity. But still more is it difficult, except to minds that are deeply religious, to meet with the gentleness and serenity of faith the positive injuries - the injustice, the scorn, the ridicule, the pain and persecution which others, needy creatures like ourselves, actually inflict upon us. It is easier, we say, to bear poverty than insult; it is easier to suffer the inclemency of the elements than to endure the unkindness of our brethren; it is easier to put up with the pain and weariness of bodily sickness than to come under the lash of the tongues of men. There is here, however, no room for hesitation and question; the rule is the same for all the crosses that come to us. God often permits us to be afflicted by the sins of others for our greater spiritual profit. Since, therefore, all alike proceed from God, either by positive act or divine



permission, and since we know that He is supremely good and loves us, having given every proof of His desire to save us, even to the delivering up of His only Son, (Romans 8:32) we can never reasonably or sincerely doubt that every evil and cross of life, with the sole exception of our personal sins, has been arranged for our good. My God, do Thou teach us the wisdom of the cross! "For this is a favor to Thy friend, that for love of Thee he may suffer and be afflicted in the world, how often soever and by whom soever Thou permittest such trials to befall him." (Imitation, Book 3, chapter 1.4)

It is helpful that here also, in learning to discern the source and meaning of our afflictions, we have ever before us the examples of the holiest souls. We know that in all trials they steadfastly look beyond the cross that presses them to the hand of Him who has placed it there. Like the shepherd's sheep, they are convinced of the power and goodness of their Master, and nothing can shake their trust in Him. Without distinction or question they accept all as coming from God by special act or sovereign permission, to purify them, to detach them from the world and creatures, to increase their nearness and likeness to Himself, to multiply their merits for Heaven and bring them to everlasting crowns. They discover the workings of Providence everywhere, in things that are painful, as well as in things that are pleasant to nature. Thus behind their pangs of body and mind, behind the whips and scorns of time, behind the tongue that slanders and calumniates them, behind the oppressor's wrong, the injustice and tyranny of princes and rulers, behind all the evils of life they see the hand of Him who directs and governs all. But here we must not conclude that the Saints and holy persons have never resisted evil and evil-doers, and that consequently we must not. This would be a serious mistake, as Church history and hagiography plainly prove. Who was ever more vigorous and fearless in opposing wrong and the doers of wrong than Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, and Saint Jerome? Who was ever more persistent in his efforts to prevail against the evils of sin in others than Saint Monica, Saint Teresa, Saint Dominic, and Saint Catharine of Siena? After their example, then, we may and we must struggle against evils of all kinds, whether physical or spiritual, whether from ourselves or from others, in so far as it is not certain that it is the will of God that we should submit to them. But when we have exerted ourselves reasonably and lawfully to rid our lives of that which afflicts us, and still it persists, there can be no further doubt that it is the will of God that we should patiently

and submissively accept our condition and our cross. Since, however, we do not know how long it is the wish of Providence that we should be burdened and afflicted, we may continue patiently to use every legitimate means to be delivered, provided it be done with humble resignation to the will of our heavenly Father.

The acceptance of injuries, therefore, on the part of holy souls is not a weak yielding to inevitable circumstances, nor a willing consent to the wrongs of others. Like Saint Paul, they know whom they have believed, (2 Timothy 1:12) and they are certain that, in due time, divine justice will bring all evil-doers to an evil end and will deliver the just from their troubles. And further, when the vengeance of the persecutor is turned upon them, and they are hunted down without reason by their kind, even by the members of their own household, they remember the words of their Shepherd, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the good man of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household!" (Matthew 10:24,25)

And again, when the servants of God behold the wicked prospering and the just oppressed; when they see the ambitious, the covetous, the unscrupulous preferred and honored, and they themselves plotted against and rejected, their heart is not disturbed, because they know first of all that "to them that love God, all things work together unto good," (Romans 8:28) and secondly, they are persuaded that the efforts of sinners must finally fail. "For the hope of the wicked is as dust, which is blown away with the wind, and as a thin froth which is dispersed by the storm: and as a smoke that is scattered abroad by the wind: and as the remembrance of a guest of one day that passeth by." (Wisdom 5:15) In a word, then, those who are really the friends of God have faith and confidence in their heavenly Master; and all the perils of earth, and all the powers of darkness cannot avail to daunt them or turn them aside from their purpose.

This steadfastness of religious trust we, in our turn, must strive to acquire. It is the only way to peace and victory. If we would ever rise above the evils of our lives we must learn to look to God for every thing. And this looking to God must be, not only as to our bountiful benefactor, but as to a kind

master who knows how best to discipline his servants and preserve them from irreparable harm.

There is a substantially correct translation of the final verse of the Shepherd Psalm, which may be rendered as follows: "And Thy goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever." It is the special wording of the second clause of the stanza that expresses the real purpose of divine Providence in regard to the elect. Everything in life has been ordained and arranged for their eternal salvation, and for the increase of their heavenly rewards. "Therefore," wrote Saint Paul to Timothy, "I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with heavenly glory." (2 Timothy 2:10) It is this firm conviction that infinite love is at the bottom of all the workings of Providence, doing everything for the sake of the elect, that consoles and steadies the souls of the just throughout all the trials and crosses of life. In the thick of the battle they never lose sight of the faithful Shepherd that leads them, and they ever behold by faith the unspeakable delights He has prepared for them that love Him.

What joys are there in our faith and hope! If by the mercy and goodness of God we succeed in saving our souls, how cheap will seem the price we shall have paid for Heaven, and how benign and ineffably loving will appear the Providence of God which is leading us there! At times now in our fervor we can faintly and feebly imagine what it will mean to throw off forever this veil of faith and see distinctly and continually the Shepherd of our souls. But our liveliest conceptions here are infinitely inferior to the vision to come. "To see God face to face, as He is; to gaze undazzled on the Three Divine Persons, cognizable and distinct in the burning fires of their inaccessible splendors; to behold that long-coveted sight, the endless Generation of the All-holy Son, and our hearts to hold the joy, and not die; to watch with spirits all out-stretched in adoration the ever-radiant and ineffably beautiful Procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son, and to participate ourselves in that jubilee of jubilees, and drink in with greedy minds the wonders of that Procession, and the marvelous distinctness of its beauty from the Generation of the Son; to feel ourselves with ecstatic awe, and yet with seraphic intimacy, overshadowed by the Person of the Unbegotten Father, the Father to whom and of whom we have

said so much on earth, the Fountain of Godhead, who is truly our Father, while He is also the Father of the Eternal Son; to explore, with exulting license and with unutterably glad fear, attribute after attribute, oceans opening into oceans of divinest beauty; to lie astonished in unspeakable contentment before the vision of God's surpassing Unity, so long the joyous mystery of our predilection, while the Vision through all eternity seems to grow more fresh and bright and new: O my poor soul! what canst thou know of this, or of these beautiful necessities, of thy exceeding love, which shall only satisfy itself in endless alternations, now of silence and now of song?" (Faber, *Creator and Creature*, Book 2, chapter 5)

If regret were possible for the blessed hereafter, they would never cease to mourn over the loss of their opportunities on earth to increase their eternal beatitude. It is only when the veil shall have been removed that we shall fully realize how the goodness and mercy of God have always pursued us in this life, that we might be saved and enjoy the rewards of His house forever. May God give us all that child-like trust in our heavenly Master which the sheep display toward their shepherd; may He grant us that vivid constant faith of the Saints which will enable us to see in every event of life, in adversity as well as in prosperity, in our pains as well as in our joys, the designs of a loving Father who is ever wishing and trying to lead His children to His home of eternal delights.

## About This EBook

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